

the army were drawn into civil wars in support of rival emperors – 'increased the social security and power of the upper Ten Thousand'.

To conclude this section, I wish to emphasise that I make no claim to be producing *the* 'Marxist interpretation of Greek history': it is a would-be Marxist interpretation. After reading by far the greater part of Marx's published work (much of it, I must admit, in English translation), I myself believe that there is nothing in this book which Marx himself (after some argument, perhaps!) would not have been willing to accept. But of course there will be other Marxists who will disagree at various points with my basic theoretical position or with the interpretations I have offered of specific events, institutions and ideas; and I hope that any errors or weaknesses in this book will not be taken as directly due to the approach I have adopted, unless that can be shown to be the case.

*Class*

'The concept of class... Particularly when... invariably display... of a book, *Class*... leading German so... of Economics and... approval the state... Bendix, that 'disc... stitutes for a real c... to me hardly poss... all class *struggle* (c... some people woul... 'impartiality' or '... judgments. The c... commonly admit... 'bias', and it is c... disagreement. Ye... logical bias does n... objectivity' (RB 4)... first, its *objectivity*... secondly, the *fruit*... processes' I shoul... shrink from that u... when he wrote, '*A*... the altar of a gene... what is called – so... – 'narrative histo... history' by the pre

I do not see how... social structures... situations... The... is surely the desi... discover what w... mankind; we ther... Ancient History a... Can we actually

the Greeks themselves recognise their existence? And is it profitable to conduct an investigation along these lines? Is our understanding of the historical process, and of our own society, illuminated and strengthened by thinking in terms of classes and of a 'class struggle' in the Greek world? When I find Lévi-Strauss saying, 'I am not a sociologist, and my interest in our own society is only a secondary one' (SA 338), I want to reply, 'I am a historian who tries also to be a sociologist, and my interest in our own society is a primary one.'

I am not going to pretend that class is an entity existing objectively in its own right, like a Platonic 'Form', the nature of which we merely have to discover. The word has been used by historians and sociologists in all sorts of different senses;<sup>1</sup> but I believe that the way in which Marx chose to use it is the most fruitful, for our own society and for all earlier ones above the primitive level, including Greek and Roman society. Now Marx never, unfortunately, gave a definition of the term 'class', and it is true that he uses it rather differently on different occasions, above all when he is speaking of actual historical circumstances, in which the nature of the particular classes involved could differ considerably.<sup>2</sup> Even when, at the very end of the unfinished third volume of *Capital*, pp.885-6 (cf. 618),<sup>3</sup> he was about to answer his own question, 'What constitutes a class?' he only had time to say that the reply to this question 'follows naturally from the reply to another question, namely: What makes wage-labourers, capitalists and landlords constitute the three great social classes?' – as indeed they did, at the period of which and during which he was writing. He did not live to write down his answer to even that prior question, which would have produced a definition of the classes of nineteenth-century capitalist society rather than of class in general; and whether he would then have gone on to give an explicit general definition of class, we cannot tell. But after collecting scores if not hundreds of passages in which Marx operates with the concept of class (sometimes without actually using that word), I have little doubt what essential form it took in his mind. (I can give only a preliminary sketch here: I shall attempt to provide a proper account in Section ii of this chapter and subsequently.)

Class as a general concept (as distinct from a particular class) is essentially a relationship; and class in Marx's sense must be understood in close connection with his fundamental concept of 'the relations of production': the social relations into which men enter in the process of production, which find legal expression to a large degree either as property relations or as labour relations. When the conditions of production, such as they are at any given time, are controlled by a particular group (when, as in the great majority of such cases,<sup>4</sup> there is private property in the means of production), then we have a 'class society', the classes being defined in terms of their relationship to the means and the labour of production and to each other. Some of the most important 'means of production' in the modern world – not only factories, but also banks and finance houses, even railways and aircraft – were of course absent in Classical antiquity, and so, to a great extent, was that wage labour which is an essential element, indeed the essential element, in the relations of production characteristic of a capitalist economy. (As we shall see in III.vi below, free wage labour played an infinitely less important part in the Greek and Roman world than it does today.) In the ancient Greek world the principal means of production was land, and the principal form in which labour was directly exploited was unfree labour – that of

chattel slaves above all; but debt bondage was far more widespread than many historians have realised, and in the Roman empire agricultural labour came to be exploited more and more through forms of tenancy (at first involving mainly free men), which in the late third century were converted into legal serfdom. (I shall give precise definitions of slavery, serfdom and debt bondage in III.iv below.) In antiquity, therefore, wealth may be said to have consisted above all in the ownership of land, and in the control of unfree labour; and it was these assets above all which enabled the propertied class to exploit the rest of the population: that is to say, to appropriate a surplus out of their labour.

At this point I must introduce an important and difficult subject which needs careful treatment and can easily lead to serious confusion, and which I intend to deal with properly in Chapter IV below. I refer to the fact that a large part of production in antiquity was always carried on, until the Later Roman Empire (and to a certain degree even then), by small free producers, mainly peasants, but also artisans and traders. In so far as these numerous individuals neither exploited the labour of others (outside their own families) to any appreciable extent nor were themselves exploited to any marked degree, but lived not far above subsistence level, producing little surplus beyond what they themselves consumed, they formed a kind of intermediate class, between exploiters and exploited. In practice, however, they were only too likely to be exploited. As I shall explain in Chapter IV, this exploitation could be not only direct and individual (by landlords or moneylenders, for instance) but also indirect and collective, effected by taxation, military conscription or forced services exacted by the state or the municipalities.

It is very hard to assess the condition of these small free producers accurately. The vast majority were what I shall call peasants (see my definition in IV.ii below), a term covering a wide variety of conditions, which nevertheless can be convenient to use, especially where we are in doubt about the precise situation of the people concerned. In Chapter IV I shall try to show the wide variety of institutions involved, and how the fortunes of some groups might fluctuate very considerably according to their political and legal as well as their economic position.

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Other categories than those of class, in the sense in which I am using that concept, have of course been proposed for the analysis, or at least the description, of Greek society. I shall consider some of them in Section v of this chapter.

Historians, who are usually dealing with a single society, rarely trouble themselves with any reflections about their choice of categories: they are seldom aware of any problem in this respect; often it does not even occur to them that there is any need to go beyond the concepts employed by the members of the society they are studying. Indeed, a practising historian in the British – and American – empirical tradition may well say to us (as the author of a major recent book on the Roman emperor has virtually done: see the opening of Section v of this Chapter): 'Why on earth should we waste time on all this theoretical stuff, about class structure and social relations and historical method? Why can't we just go on doing history in the good old way, without bothering about the concepts and categories we employ? That might even involve us in the



philosophy of history, which is something we prefer to abandon with disdain to philosophers and sociologists, as mere ideology.' The reply to this, of course, is that it is a serious error to suppose that unconsciousness of ideology, or even a complete lack of interest in it, is the same thing as absence of ideology. In reality each of us has an ideological approach to history, resulting in a particular historical methodology and set of general concepts, whether conscious or unconscious. To refuse – as so many do – to define or even to think about the basic concepts we employ simply results in our taking over without scrutiny, lock, stock and barrel, the prevailing ideology in which we happen to have been brought up, and making much the same kind of selection from the evidence that our predecessors have been making and for the same reasons.

Nevertheless, there are very great virtues in the traditional approach of the historian, the essence of which – the insistence on recognising the *specificity* of the historical situation in any given period (and even area) – must not be abandoned, or even compromised, when it is combined with a sociological approach. Indeed, anyone who is not capable (whether from a deficiency of intellect or from lack of time or energy) of the great effort needed to combine the two approaches ought to prefer the strictly historical one, for even mediocre work produced by the purely fact-grubbing historian may at least, if his facts are accurate and fairly presented, be of use to others capable of a higher degree of synthesis, whereas the would-be sociologist having insufficient knowledge of the specific historical evidence for a particular period of history is unlikely in the extreme to say anything about it that will be of use to anyone else.

The study of ancient history in Britain has long been characterised by an attitude to detailed empirical investigation which *in itself* is most admirable. In a recent reassessment of Rostovtzeff's great *Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire*, Glen Bowersock of Harvard University (who had himself been through the Oxford Greats School and was a graduate pupil of Sir Ronald Syme) has spoken of a general raising of eyebrows in Oxford when Rostovtzeff, who had come there in 1918 as an exile from his native Russia, 'announced that he would lecture on no less a subject than "The Social and Economic History of Eastern and Western Hellenism, the Roman Republic, and the Roman Empire"'. He adds, 'Together with the immodest grandeur of Rostovtzeff's topic went, perhaps inevitably, an occasional cloudiness of thought'; and he records Rostovtzeff's own remark in the Preface to his book, 'Evidently the English mind, in this respect unlike the Slavonic, dislikes a lack of precision in thought or expression.'<sup>5</sup> Now here we come right up against a problem which faces every historian: how to reconcile full and scrupulous attention to all forms of evidence for his chosen subject and a study of the modern literature relating to it with a grasp of general historical methodology and sociological theory sufficient to enable him to make the most of what he learns. Few if any of us strike exactly the right balance between these very different desiderata. It has been said that the sociologist comes to know 'less and less about more and more', the historian 'more and more about less and less'. Most of us fall too decisively into one or other of these categories. We are like Plutarch's truly pious man, who has to negotiate a difficult course between the precipice of godlessness and the marsh of superstition (*Mor.* 378a), or Bunyan's Christian in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, treading a narrow path between, on the right

hand, 'a very deep Ditch . . . into which the blind have led the blind in all Ages, and have both there miserably perished', and on the left, 'a very dangerous Quagg, into which, if even a good Man falls, he can find no bottom for his foot to stand on'.

I feel much happier, in dealing with the history of the ancient Greek world, if I can legitimately make use of categories of social analysis which are not only *precise*, in the sense that I can define them, but also *general*, in the sense that they can be applied to the analysis of other human societies. Class, in my sense, is eminently such a category. Nevertheless, I realise that it is a healthy instinct on the part of historians in the empirical tradition to feel the need at least to *begin from* the categories and even the terminology in use within the society they are studying – provided, of course, they do not remain imprisoned therein. In our case, if the Greeks did not 'have a word for' something we want to talk about, it may be a salutary warning to us that the phenomena we are looking for may not have existed in Greek times, or at any rate not in the same form as today. And so, in Section iv of this chapter, I propose to *begin from* the categories employed by the ancient Greeks themselves, at the time of their greatest self-awareness (the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.), to describe their own society. It will immediately become obvious that there is a striking similarity between those categories and some of the features of Marx's class analysis: this is particularly clear in Aristotle's *Politics*.

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Let us now get down to fundamentals. I begin with five propositions. First, man is a social animal – and not only that, but, as Marx says in the *Grundrisse* (E.T. 84), 'an animal which can develop into an individual only in society'. (Although in the same passage Marx contemptuously and rightly dismissed the individual and isolated hunter or fisherman who serves as the starting-point for Adam Smith and Ricardo – or, for that matter, Thomas Hobbes – as an uninspired conceit in the tradition of Robinson Crusoe, it is impossible not to recall at this point Hobbes's famous description of the life of his imaginary pre-societal man, in *Leviathan* I.13, as 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short'.) Secondly, the prime task of man in society is to organise production, in the broadest sense, including both the acquisition from outside his society, by trade or forcible appropriation, of such necessary or desirable things as the society needs but cannot produce, or cannot profitably produce, within itself, and the distribution of what is produced. (In an area which is large or, like the Greek world, much split up by mountains or the sea, the nature of the transport system may be an important factor.) I shall use the term 'production' in this convenient, extended sense, as Marx commonly does.<sup>6</sup> It should hardly be necessary to add that production, in the very broad sense in which I am using the word, of course includes reproduction: the bearing and rearing to maturity of offspring (cf. Section vi of this chapter). Thirdly, in the very act of living in society and organising production, man necessarily enters into a particular system of social and economic relations, which Marx referred to as 'the relations of production' or 'the social relations of production'.<sup>7</sup> Fourthly, in a civilised society such as that of the ancient Greeks or ourselves, the producers of actual necessities must (for obvious reasons, to be noticed presently) produce a surplus beyond what



they actually consume themselves. And fifthly, the extraction and perpetuation of such a surplus has led in practice to exploitation, in particular of the primary agricultural producers: this exploitation, with which the whole concept of class is associated, is the very kernel of what I refer to as 'the class struggle'. (I shall deal with it in Sections ii and iii of this chapter. As I shall there explain, when I speak about 'the class struggle' in the ancient world I am never thinking of a struggle on the political plane alone, and sometimes my 'class struggle' may have virtually no political aspect at all.)

I should perhaps add, for the benefit of those who are accustomed to 'structuralist' terminology, that I have not found it useful or possible to draw the distinction employed by Lévi-Strauss and his school between social *relations* and social *structure* (see e.g. Lévi-Strauss, *SA* 279, 303-4). I shall sometimes speak of a set of social relations *as* a social structure, or social formation.

I am of course thinking throughout in terms of the civilised societies of the last few thousand years, which, having developed technologically far beyond the level of primitive man, have aimed at providing themselves with a sufficient and stable supply of the necessities and luxuries of civilised life, and consequently have had to devote a very considerable volume of effort to ensuring that supply. Some anthropologists have argued that by reducing their wants to a minimum, primitives existing in a favourable environment may be thought happier than men in at least the earlier stages of civilisation, and may even enjoy a good deal of leisure; but for my purposes primitive society<sup>8</sup> is irrelevant, since its structure is totally different from that of Graeco-Roman antiquity (let alone the modern world), and any exploitation which may exist at the primitive stage takes place in quite different ways. Moreover, primitive society has not proved able to survive contact with developed modern economies – to put it in the crudest possible way, with Hilaire Belloc (*The Modern Traveller*, vi),

Whatever happens we have got  
The Maxim gun, and they have not.

Now in a primitive food-gathering and hunting tribe the mere day-to-day provision of food and other immediate necessities and of defence against wild beasts and other tribes and so on may be virtually a whole-time job for all adult members of the tribe, at least in the sense that in practice they do not extend their economic activities much further.<sup>9</sup> In a civilised community, however, it is not possible for everyone to spend all his time on these basic activities: there must be at least some members of the community who have enough *leisure* – in the technical sense of being released from directly producing the material necessities of life – for governing and organising and administering a complex society; for defending it against outsiders, with whatever weapons may be needed; for educating the next generation and training them in all the necessary skills, over a period of perhaps ten to twenty years; for the arts and sciences (whatever stage of development these may have reached); and for the many other requirements of civilised life. Such people (or some of them) must be at least partly freed from the cruder tasks, so that they may fulfil their specialised functions. And this means that they will have to be maintained by the rest of the community, or some part of it, in return for the services they provide. The producers will now

have to produce more than what they themselves consume – in other words, a *surplus*.<sup>10</sup> And 'the appearance of a surplus makes possible – which does not mean "necessary" – structural transformations in a society' (Godelier, *RIE* 274).

In view of the controversy which has been going on for years among economic anthropologists about the whole notion of a 'surplus', I feel it is necessary to make two observations on that concept. First, I use the term in a strictly relative sense and with (so to speak) an 'internal' application, to mean that part of the product of an individual man's labour of which he does not directly enjoy the fruit himself, and the immediate benefits of which are reserved for others. I would distinguish an 'external' application of the term surplus, namely the way in which the notion is employed by anthropologists such as Pearson, to mean something set aside by *the society as a whole*, or by those who make its decisions, as 'surplus to its needs', and made available for some specific purpose – feasts, war, exchange with other societies, and so forth.<sup>11</sup> Secondly, I agree with Godelier that there is no *necessary* connection between the existence of a surplus and the exploitation of man by man: there may at first be exchange considered profitable by both sides, with certain persons taking upon themselves services genuinely performed on behalf of the whole community<sup>12</sup> – its defence against attack from outside, for example.<sup>13</sup> The precise point in history at which exploitation should be conceived as beginning is very difficult to decide, and I have not made up my own mind. The question is not important for my present purposes, because exploitation began long before the period with which I am concerned in this book. Perhaps we could say that exploitation begins when the primary producer is obliged to yield up a surplus under the influence of compulsion (whether political, economic or social, and whether perceived as compulsion or not), at any rate at the stage when he no longer receives a real equivalent in exchange – although this may make it very difficult to decide the point at which exploitation begins, since it is hard to quantify, for example, military protection against agricultural produce (cf. IV.iv below). A much more sophisticated definition of exploitation (which may well be preferable) has been offered by Dupré and Rey on the basis of their anthropological fieldwork in west Africa: 'Exploitation exists when the *use* of the surplus product by a group (or an aggregate) which has not contributed the corresponding surplus of labour reproduces the conditions of a new extortion of surplus labour from the producers' (RPTHC 152, my italics). Although even a good and fully socialist society must arrange for 'surplus labour' by some, to support the very young, the aged and the infirm, and to provide all kinds of services for the community (cf. Marx, *Cap.* III.847, 876), it would necessarily do so in such a way that no individual or group of individuals had a right to appropriate the fruits of that 'surplus labour' in virtue of any special control over the process of production through property rights, or indeed except at the direction of the community as a whole or its organs of government.

In every civilised society there has been a basic problem of production: how to extract a sufficient surplus ('sufficient' in a relative sense, of course) from the primary producers, who are not likely to relish their position at the base of the social pyramid and will have to be subjected to a judicious mixture of persuasion and coercion – the more so if they have come to see the favoured few as exploiters and oppressors. Now men's capacity to win for themselves the freedom to live the



life they want to live has always been severely limited, until very recently, by inadequate development of the productive forces at their disposal.

All emancipation carried through hitherto has been based on restricted productive forces. The production which these productive forces could provide was insufficient for the whole of society and made development possible only if some persons satisfied their needs at the expense of others, and therefore some – the minority – obtained the monopoly of development, while others – the majority – owing to the constant struggle to satisfy their most essential needs, were for the time being (i.e. until the creation of new revolutionary productive forces) excluded from any development (MECW V.431-2, from the *German Ideology*; cf. Cap. III.820, quoted in Liv above).

If I were asked to name the fundamental features of ancient Greek society which most distinguish it from the contemporary world, I would single out two things, closely connected, which I shall describe in succession. The first, within the field of what Marx called 'the forces of production', is a technological distinction. The advanced countries of the modern world have immense productive power. But go back to the ancient world, and you go down and down the technological ladder, so to speak. The Greek world, compared with the modern one, was very undeveloped technologically, and therefore infinitely less productive.<sup>14</sup> Great advances in technology occurred long before the Industrial Revolution, in the Middle Ages and even the Dark Ages. These advances were far more important than most people realise, not only in the most essential sphere of all, that of sources of energy or 'prime movers' (which I shall come to in a moment), but in all sorts of other ways. To take only one example – I wonder how many people who have not only read Greek and Latin literature but have looked at Greek vase-paintings and at the reliefs on Greek and Roman monuments have noticed the absence from antiquity of the wheelbarrow, which at least doubles a man's carrying capacity, but only appears in Europe in the thirteenth century (in China it was known a thousand years earlier).<sup>15</sup> As for sources of energy, I will say only that animal power, in the form of the tractive effort of the horse and ox, was nothing like fully realised in Classical antiquity, in particular because of the extreme inefficiency of the ancient horse-harness;<sup>16</sup> and that only in the Middle Ages do we find the widespread utilisation of two important forms of energy which were very little used in antiquity: wind and water (cf. n. 14 below). Wind, of course, was used for the propulsion of merchant ships, though not very efficiently and without the stern-post rudder;<sup>17</sup> but the windmill was not known in Europe before (or not much before) the early twelfth century. The water-mill<sup>18</sup> (*hydraletēs*) was actually invented not later than the last century B.C.: the earliest known mention is by the Greek geographer Strabo, in a reference to Pontus, on the south shore of the Black Sea, in the 60s B.C. (XII.iii.30, p.556). But the most fascinating piece of evidence is the delightful poem in the *Greek Anthology*, by Antipater of Thessalonica, to which I referred in I.iv above as being known to Marx: the poet innocently assures the slave mill-girls that now they have the water-nymphs to work for them they can sleep late and take their ease (*Anth. Pal.* IX.418: see Cap. I.408). There is a little evidence, both literary and archaeological, for the use of the water-mill in the Graeco-Roman world, but it was rare before the fourth and fifth centuries, and its full use comes a good deal later (see n. 14 again). Marx realised that 'the Roman Empire had handed down the elementary form of all machinery in the

water-wheel' (Cap. I.348).

That is the essential background to my second basic distinction between the ancient and the modern world, which is intimately connected with the first and indeed largely grew out of it. In the ancient world, as we have seen, the producers, as I am calling them (men engaged in essential economic activities), produced a very much smaller surplus than is necessary to sustain a modern advanced society. This remains vitally important, even if we allow for the fact that the average Greek had a far more restricted range of wants and demanded a much lower standard of living than the modern Englishman, so that the volume of production per head could be well below what it has to be today. But even if we make allowance for this the disparity is still very striking. As I have shown, the ancient world was enormously less productive than the modern world. Therefore, unless almost everyone was to have to work practically all the time, and have virtually no leisure, some means had to be found of extracting the largest possible surplus out of at any rate a considerable number of those at the lowest levels of society. And this is where we come face to face with the second of my two fundamental distinctions between the ancient and the modern world, one that occurs this time in the field of what Marx called 'the relations of production': the propertied classes in the Greek and Roman world derived their surplus, which freed them from the necessity of taking part in the process of production, nor from wage labour, as in capitalist society, but mainly from unfree labour of various kinds. The ancient world knew other forms of unfree labour than strict 'slavery' ('chattel slavery', if you like), in particular what I shall call 'serfdom' and 'debt bondage' (see III.iv below). But in general slavery was the most important form of unfree labour at the highest periods of Greek and Roman civilisation; and the Greeks and Romans themselves always tended to employ the vocabulary of actual slavery when referring to other forms of unfree labour.

I have indicated that it is above all in relation to its function of extracting the maximum surplus out of those primary producers who were at the lowest levels of ancient society that I propose to consider slavery and other forms of unfree labour in this book. In treating slavery in this manner I am looking at it in very much the way that both masters and slaves have commonly regarded it. (Whether the ancient belief in the efficiency of the institution of slavery in this respect is justified or not is irrelevant for my purposes.) Perhaps I may cite here the opening of the third chapter of one of the best-known books on North American slavery, Kenneth Stampp's *The Peculiar Institution* (p.86):

Slaves apparently thought of the South's peculiar institution chiefly as a system of labour extortion. Of course they felt its impact in other ways – in their social status, their legal status, and their private lives – but they felt it most acutely in the lack of control over their own time and labour. If discontented with bondage, they could be expected to direct their protests principally against the master's claim to their work.

The feature of slavery which made it appropriate and indeed essential and irreplaceable in the economic conditions of Classical antiquity was precisely that the labour it provided was forced. The slave, by definition, is a man without rights (or virtually without effective rights) and therefore unable to protect himself against being compelled to yield up a very large part of what he produces. Dio



Chrysostom, in the early second century of the Christian era, reports an imaginary discussion about slavery in which there was general agreement about the basic definition of the slave's condition: that someone else 'owns him as master, like any other item of property or cattle, so as to be able to make use of him at his pleasure' (*Orat.* XV.24).

I suggest that the most profitable way of approaching the problem of unfree labour is to think of it in precisely the way in which I have introduced it, in terms of *the extraction of the largest possible surplus from the primary producers*. I think that in antiquity slavery probably did provide the best possible answer, from the purely economic point of view (that is to say, disregarding all social as well as moral factors), having regard to the low level of productivity, and also to the fact that *free, hired labour* was scarce, largely confined to unskilled or seasonal work, and not at all mobile, whereas slaves were available in large numbers and at prices the lowness of which is astonishing, in comparison with what is known of slave prices in other societies. But given these conditions – the poor supply of free, hired labour, the easy availability of slaves, their cheapness, and so on – I do believe that slavery increased the surplus in the hands of the propertied class to an extent which could not otherwise have been achieved and was therefore an essential precondition of the magnificent achievements of Classical civilisation. I would draw attention to the fact that the distinction I have just drawn is based not on a difference of *status*, between slaves and free men, but on a difference of *class*, between slaves and their owners – a very different matter. (I shall return to this difference later: see Sections iii and v of this chapter.)

It may not have been fully obvious that so far I have been preparing the ground for the definition of the terms 'class' and 'class struggle' which I shall offer in Section ii of this chapter. I had to make clear certain fundamental features of ancient Greek society. I have now explained one of these, the essential part played by what I am calling unfree labour; and I must now briefly mention another, the fact that by far the most important means of production in the ancient world was land. Wealth in Classical antiquity was always essentially landed wealth, and the ruling classes of all the Greek states, as of Rome itself, invariably consisted mainly of landowners. This is something which most ancient historians now realise; but the whole question, like that of slavery and other forms of unfree labour, will require a more extended discussion than I can give it at this point (see III.i-iii below).

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In seeking to use the concept of class as a method of historical analysis there are two quite different dangers that we must guard against: one, a matter of definition, is in the province of the sociologist; the other, a matter of identification, is a question strictly for the historian. After stating them together, I shall briefly discuss them separately. First, we must be quite sure what we mean by the term 'class' (and 'class struggle'), and not slide carelessly and unconsciously from one interpretation to another. Secondly, we must be careful to make a correct historical identification of any class we propose to recognise.

1. The first problem, that of definition, is of a sociological nature. Marx himself, as I said earlier, never gave a definition of class in general terms. Some may feel that no such general definition is possible, but I believe the one I shall

produce in Section ii below will serve well enough, although there may be some special cases in which a unique set of historical circumstances makes qualification necessary. Even if it could be shown that there are too many exceptions for my definition to be considered a general one, I would at least claim that it holds for the society, or rather series of societies, of the Graeco-Roman world, discussed in this book. I hope that others will improve upon it.

2. The second problem is purely historical: one must thoroughly understand the particular society one is considering, and know the evidence about it at first hand, before one can expect to identify its classes correctly and precisely. Some serious mistakes have been made in defining the actual classes existing in particular societies, and the results of employing unreal conceptions of those classes, not corresponding closely with reality, have sometimes been disastrous. Misconceptions about classes existing in historical societies have not, of course, been confined to Marxists, by any means, but since they make more use of class categories than other historians they are likely to commit even worse blunders if they start out with misconceptions about the classes they recognise. It has been a standard practice among ancient historians to refer to the governing classes of several Greek cities in the Archaic and Classical periods, in particular Aegina and Corinth, as 'commercial aristocracies' or 'industrial and merchant classes' (see my *OPW* 264-7, esp. n.61; cf. 216, 218-20, and Appendix XLI, esp. p.396). This extraordinary notion, for which there is not a shred of ancient evidence, was adopted without examination by Busolt, Eduard Meyer and other leading historians (even Max Weber was not entirely free of it), and it is still being reproduced today in some quarters. Not a few Marxists have started out from similarly mistaken positions. It is not surprising that attempts by George Thomson (essentially a literary scholar and not a historian in the proper sense) to expound the intellectual development of the Classical Greek world in Marxist terms have not succeeded in convincing historians or philosophers; for Thomson presents the development of Greek thought, and even of Greek democracy, in the sixth and fifth centuries as the consequence of the rise to power of a wholly imaginary 'merchant class'. Thomson even describes the Pythagoreans of Croton as 'the new class of rich industrialists and merchants', who 'resembled Solon in being actively involved in the political struggle for the development of commodity production'.<sup>19</sup> In my opinion, this is little better than fantasy. The one book I know in English which explicitly seeks to give an account of Greek history (before the Roman period) in Marxist terms is a prime example of the methodological catastrophe involved in giving a would-be Marxist account in terms of classes that are fictions and correspond to no historical reality. The author, Margaret O. Wason, pretends that in the seventh and sixth centuries, in most Greek states, there came to power a 'new bourgeois class', defined as 'the class of merchants and artisans which challenged the power of the aristocracy'. It is no surprise to find Cleon referred to in the same book as 'a tanner' (this of course reproduces Aristophanes' caricature; cf. my *OPW* 235 n.7, 359-61, 371) and as 'the leader of the Athenian workers'.<sup>20</sup>

I may add that it would similarly be absurd to speak of a 'class struggle' between Senators and Equites in the Late Roman Republic. Here I am in full agreement with a number of non-Marxist ancient historians of very different outlooks. As P. A. Brunt and Claude Nicolet have so conclusively demonstrated



in the last few years, the Equites were part of the class of large landowners to which the Senators also belonged. As Badian has put it, for the Senate they were simply 'the non-political members of its own class'<sup>21</sup> – those who preferred not to take upon themselves the arduous and often dangerous life that a political career would involve. At certain times a purely political contest might develop between these two groups within the propertied class on specific issues, but this must not mislead us into seeing them as two separate classes having irreconcilable interests. I shall in fact speak sometimes of the Roman Senators (though not the Equites) as a class: the 'senatorial class'. It is possible that some other Marxists may prefer not to break down my 'propertied class' (for which see III.ii below) into two or more classes for certain purposes, as I do – for example, in the developed Principate and the Later Empire, primarily into the senatorial and curial classes, with the Equites perhaps as a kind of sub-class closely attached to the Senators, until in the late fourth and early fifth centuries they were entirely absorbed into the senatorial class (see VI.vi below, *ad fin.*). But in my set of definitions, early in Section ii of this chapter, I allow for *Rechtsstellung* (legal or constitutional situation) as a factor that can help to determine class in so far as it affects the type and degree of exploitation practised or suffered; and the constitutional privileges enjoyed by Senators surely did materially increase their capacity to exploit – just as the condition of being a slave, with its severe juridical disabilities, greatly increased the slave's liability to exploitation. But I could quite understand if some other Marxists, feeling that it was above all their great wealth which lay at the root of the Senators' privileged position, rather than the office-holding and the consequential legal privileges it brought them, preferred to treat the Senators merely as an 'order' (which they certainly were) rather than a class. Perhaps 'sub-class' would be a convenient term; but I have avoided it.

\* \* \* \* \*

I have only one more preliminary point to make before proceeding to a definition of my terms: I am deliberately avoiding, at this stage, discussion of the terms 'caste', 'order', 'estate' (*état*). Caste is a phenomenon which we do not encounter at all in the Greek or Roman world.<sup>22</sup> We do find what can legitimately be described as 'orders' (or 'estates') – that is to say, status-groups (*Stände*) which are legally recognised as such and have different sets of juridical characteristics (privileges or disadvantages). Such groups will be noticed when we have occasion to discuss them. I shall have something to say of 'status-groups' in general, and (in Section v of this chapter) of 'status' as an alternative concept to 'class'. But although I shall of course refer at times to particular 'orders' (citizens, slaves, freedmen, senators, equestrians, curials), I shall take no special account of 'orders' as such, treating them as a rule merely as a special form of status-group, except in so far as they materially affect the degree of exploitation concerned (cf. the preceding paragraph).

(ii)

### 'Class', 'exploitation', and 'the class struggle' defined

We can now attempt to define 'class', 'exploitation', and 'class struggle'. As I said in Section i of this chapter, I am not going to pretend that there is an objective entity, class, the nature of which remains to be discovered. I would

also deny that there is any definition of class which is so generally agreed upon that we are all obliged to accept it or run the risk of being accused of perversity. The concept has been discussed *ad nauseam* by sociologists during the past few decades (cf. n.1 to Section i above). After working through a good deal of the literature, most of which seems to me almost worthless, I feel entitled to insist from the outset that the disagreement about the best way of using the expression 'class' has been so great that anyone who attempts an analysis of any society in terms of class is entitled to establish his own criteria, within very wide limits, and that our verdict on the definition he adopts ought to depend solely on its clarity and consistency, the extent to which it corresponds with the historical realities to which it is applied, and its fruitfulness as a tool of historical and sociological analysis. If in addition we find (as we shall in this case) that the notion of class in the sense in which we define it corresponds closely with concepts employed in the best sociological thought of the society we are examining (in our case, that of Aristotle especially: see Section iv of this chapter), then we shall be fortunate indeed.

I should like to quote here a statement by a leading British sociologist, T. B. Bottomore, raising questions which are all too unfamiliar to many historians. Speaking of the construction of general concepts by sociologists, he says:

In some recent attempts to improve the 'conceptual framework' of sociology, and notably in that of Talcott Parsons and his collaborators, the whole emphasis is placed upon definition of concepts rather than upon the use of concepts in explanation. This is a retrograde step by comparison with the work of Durkheim and Max Weber, both of whom introduced and defined concepts in the course of working out explanatory theories. Weber's exposition of his 'ideal type' method deals more clearly with this matter than any later writing, and had his ideas been followed up sociology would have been spared much confused and aimless discussion. In essentials his argument is that the value of a definition (i.e. of a concept) is only to be determined by its fruitfulness in research and theorising (*Sociology*<sup>2</sup> [1971] 37, cf. 121).

I should not like it to be thought, however, that I regard Marx's concept of class as a Weberian 'ideal-type construct', in the sense that Weber himself took it to be. For me, as for Marx, classes and class struggles are real elements which can be empirically identified in individual cases, whereas for Weber all such 'Marxian concepts and hypotheses' become 'pernicious, as soon as they are thought of as empirically valid' (Weber, *MSS* 103, repr. in Eldridge, *MWISR* 228).

I propose first to state my definition of class and class struggle, and to explain and justify it in subsequent discussion. I believe that this definition represents the central thought of Marx as accurately as possible: this claim too I shall try to justify.

*Class* (essentially a relationship)<sup>1</sup> is the collective social expression of the fact of exploitation, the way in which exploitation is embodied in a social structure. By *exploitation* I mean the appropriation of part of the product of the labour of others:<sup>2</sup> in a commodity-producing society this is the appropriation of what Marx called 'surplus value'.

A *class* (a particular class) is a group of persons in a community identified by their position in the whole system of social production, defined above all according to their relationship (primarily in terms of the degree of ownership or control) to the conditions of production (that is to say, the means and labour of production)<sup>3</sup> and to other classes. Legal position (constitutional rights or, to use



the German term, 'Rechtsstellung') is one of the factors that may help to determine class: its share in doing so will depend on how far it affects the type and degree of exploitation practised or suffered – the condition of being a slave in the ancient Greek world, for example, was likely (though far from certain) to result in a more intense degree of exploitation than being a citizen or even a free foreigner.

The individuals constituting a given class may or may not be wholly or partly conscious of their own identity and common interests as a class, and they may or may not feel antagonism towards members of other classes as such.

It is of the essence of a *class society* that one or more of the smaller classes, in virtue of their control over the conditions of production (most commonly exercised through ownership of the means of production),<sup>4</sup> will be able to exploit – that is, to appropriate a surplus at the expense of – the larger classes, and thus constitute an economically and socially (and therefore probably also politically) superior class or classes. The exploitation may be direct and individual, as for example of wage-labourers, slaves, serfs, 'coloni', tenant-farmers or debtors by particular employers, masters, landlords or moneylenders, or it may be indirect and collective, as when taxation, military conscription, forced labour or other services are exacted solely or disproportionately from a particular class or classes (small peasant freeholders, for instance) by a State dominated by a superior class.

I use the expression *class struggle* for the fundamental relationship between classes (and their respective individual members), involving essentially exploitation, or resistance to it. It does not necessarily involve collective action by a class as such, and it may or may not include activity on a political plane, although such political activity becomes increasingly probable when the tension of class struggle becomes acute. A class which exploits others is also likely to employ forms of political domination and oppression against them when it is able to do so: democracy will mitigate this process.

*Imperialism*, involving some kind of economic and/or political subjection to a power outside the community, is a special case, in which the exploitation effected by the imperial power (in the form of tribute, for instance), or by its individual members, need not necessarily involve direct control of the conditions of production. In such a situation, however, the class struggle within the subject community is very likely to be affected, for example through support given by the imperial power or its agents to the exploiting class or classes within that community, if not by the acquisition by the imperial power or its individual members of control over the conditions of production in the subject community.

There is one aspect of my definition of class which, I realise, may need clarification. Not all individuals belong to one specific class alone: some can be regarded as members of one class for some purposes and of another class for others, although usually membership of one will be much the most significant. A slave who was allowed by his master to accumulate a considerable *peculium*, and who (like Musicus Scurranus, mentioned in III.iv below, at its n.13) had even acquired under-slaves of his own, *vicarii*, might have to be regarded *pro tanto* as a member of what I am calling 'the propertied class'; but of course his membership of that class would necessarily be qualified and precarious and dependent on the goodwill of his master. A slave who was settled by his land-

owning master as tenant of a small farm, *quasi colonus* (see IV.iii § 12 below), would in strictly economic terms be in much the same position as a poor free peasant leaseholder, and we might be inclined to put him in the class of peasants (see IV.ii below); but his legal status would remain greatly inferior and his tenancy would be much more at the pleasure of the landowner, who could therefore exploit him more severely if he were so inclined. And a poor peasant who owned or leased a plot of land so small that he regularly needed to betake himself to a neighbouring city for part of the year to earn wages would be a member of two classes: small peasants and wage-labourers. I also maintain in Section vi of this chapter that women, or at any rate married women (and so the great majority of adult women in antiquity), must be regarded for some purposes as a distinct class, although membership of such a class (because of its consequences for property-ownership) would in a city like Classical Athens be far more important to a high-born woman than to a poor peasant, who would have had no opportunity to own much property had she been a man and whose membership of the class of women would therefore be of far less significance.

Of course I have no wish to pretend that class is the only category we need for the analysis of Greek and Roman society. All I am saying is that it is the fundamental one, which *over all* (at any given moment) and *in the long run* is the most important, and is by far the most useful to us, in helping us to understand Greek history and explain the process of change within it. In Section v of this chapter I shall briefly consider alternative approaches, particularly those which have the primary aim – as I have not, and as Marx did not (see Section v) – of establishing a scheme of 'social stratification' according to 'status'. Such activities are perfectly legitimate and may even have quite useful results, provided we keep them in their proper place and realise that they will not by themselves disclose the real secrets of history: the springs and causes of human behaviour and social change. I would say that social status, and even in the long run political power, tended to *derive from* class position in the first place (as indeed political status always did directly in the commonest form of Greek oligarchy in the Classical period, based on a property qualification), and that in the long run distinctions having any other basis than the economic tended to *decay in favour of*, and *ultimately to resolve themselves into*, distinctions based upon economic class. (We shall notice some examples of this process later: see V.iii and VIII.i and ii below.)

Let us be quite clear about one thing. Whereas descriptions of ancient society in terms of some category other than class – status, for instance – are perfectly innocuous, in the sense that they need have no direct relevance to the modern world (which will of course need to be described in terms of a completely different set of statuses), an analysis of Greek and Roman society in terms of class, in the specifically Marxist sense, is indeed (to use Firth's adjective: see I.iv above) something *threatening*, something that speaks directly to every one of us today and insistently demands to be applied to the contemporary world, of the second half of the twentieth century. If Marx's analysis, originally derived above all from the study of nineteenth-century capitalist society, turns out to be equally well adapted not merely to *describe* ancient society over a long period of many centuries but to *explain* its transformations and its partial disintegration (as we shall see it is), then its relevance for the contemporary world becomes very hard to ignore. Of course in some quarters it will be ignored. To quote Marx



and Engels, addressing themselves sarcastically in 1848 to the ruling classes of their day:

The selfish misconception that induces you to transform into eternal laws of nature and of reason the social forms springing from your present mode of production and form of property – historical relations that rise and disappear in the progress of production – this misconception you share with every ruling class that has preceded you. What you see clearly in the case of ancient property, what you admit in the case of feudal property, you are of course forbidden to admit in the case of your own bourgeois form of property (MECW VI.501, from the *Communist Manifesto*).

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

I shall now glance briefly at the use of the conception of class (and class struggle) by Marx himself. I shall maintain that for five different reasons in particular there has been a widespread and serious misunderstanding of the part this idea played in Marx's thought. I believe that my definition represents his fundamental thinking more accurately than do the statements of some modern Marxist and non-Marxist writers who have taken different views from mine. My five reasons are as follows.

First, partly perhaps because of a much-quoted definition by Lenin, in his *A Great Beginning*, which (as Ossowski says, CSSC 72 and n.1) has been 'popularised by Marxist text-books and encyclopaedias', it has been customary to lay particular stress on relationship to the means of production as the decisive factor (sometimes as the one essential factor) in determining a person's class position. Although his formulation contains a profound truth, it will be seen from the definition of class given above that I regard it as a rather too narrow conception. Secondly, as is well known, Marx himself, although he made important use of the concept of class throughout his work, never gave a formal definition of it, and indeed employed it in very different senses at different times. Thirdly, Marx himself was concerned in his writings almost entirely with a capitalist society which had already undergone a considerable process of development: apart from one section of the *Grundrisse* (E.T. 471–514) which is specifically devoted to 'pre-capitalist economic formations' (see the excellent edition by Hobsbawm, *KMPCEF*), the statements in his work about pre-capitalist societies in general and the Graeco-Roman world in particular are all brief, and many of them are in the nature of *obiter dicta*. In these passages, as a rule, he takes no pains to be precise over terminology. Fourthly (and as a consequence of the facts I have just stated), when Marx spoke in particular about 'class struggle' he tended – thinking almost always, as he was, of nineteenth-century capitalism – to have in mind the kind of class struggle which was so noticeable in the mid-nineteenth century in the more developed capitalist countries: namely, open class struggle on the political plane. Thus when, for example, he spoke in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* of the French bourgeoisie as 'doing away with the class struggle for the moment by abolishing universal suffrage' (MECW XI.153), he simply meant that the law of 31 May 1850, by reducing the total number of electors from ten to seven million (id. 147), made it far harder for the French working class to carry on effective political struggle. And finally, in the work often wrongly taken to be the definitive statement of Marx's 'materialist conception of history', namely the *Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1858–9), we find only a passing reference to classes and none at all to

class struggle. There is, however, a perfectly good explanation of this, well brought out by Arthur M. Prinz in an article in the *Journal of the History of Ideas* 30 (1969) 437–50, entitled 'Background and ulterior motive of Marx's "Preface" of 1859'. The *Preface* was to be published (through the good offices of Lassalle) in Berlin, and it was absolutely necessary for Marx to take careful account of the stringent Prussian censorship and abstain from anything that might be suspected of incitement to class hatred, at that time an actual offence punishable with imprisonment under para. 100 of the Prussian Penal Code. Marx, already well known to the Prussian censors, was now living in England and in no danger of prosecution himself; but he had to be circumspect if there was to be any hope of finding a publisher, for the same paragraph of the Penal Code also prescribed the penalty of confiscation for any offending work. Yet Marx had to publish in Germany, in order to make a bid for the intellectual leadership of the German socialist movement. The *Preface*, then, had to steer clear of class struggle. But when on 17/18 September 1879 Marx and Engels – thinking back to the *Communist Manifesto* and beyond – wrote to Bebel, Liebknecht and others, 'For almost forty years we have stressed the class struggle as the immediate driving power of history' (MESC 395), they were making a perfectly correct statement. Even in those considerable parts of Marx's writing which are concerned entirely with economics or philosophy rather than with the historical process he will sometimes show that the class struggle is ever-present in his mind, as when in a letter to Engels on 30 April 1868 he rounds off a long passage on economics with the words, 'Finally . . . we have as conclusion the class struggle, into which the movement of the whole *Scheiss* is resolved' (see MESC 250).

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From reactions I have had to drafts of this chapter, I know that some people will protest against what will seem to them an excessive emphasis on collective entities, classes, at the expense of 'the individual'. To any such objection I would reply that my main aim in this book is to explain 'what happened in history' on a large scale: the history of the Greek world as a whole over more than 1,300 years – dare I use the rather repellent expression, 'macro-history'? But the history of 'macro-units' (of classes, as of states and alliances) needs to be explained in terms very different from those appropriate to the behaviour of individuals. Here I must hark back to Liv above, where I explained how I have learnt from Thucydides about the patterns of behaviour of human groups in organised States. Elsewhere I have explained at length how Thucydides – rightly, in my opinion – recognised that the canons of interpretation and judgment applicable to the actions of States are fundamentally different from those we apply to the actions of individuals (see my *OPW* 7 ff., esp. 16–28). I now wish to advance the following propositions: that the factors governing the behaviour of classes (in my sense) are different again from either of the sets I have just mentioned; that the behaviour of a class as such (that of men as members of a class) may well be inexplicable in terms we can legitimately apply to their behaviour as individuals; and even that a given individual or set of individuals may behave as a constituent part of a class in a way that is quite different from the behaviour we are entitled to expect of him or them as individuals.

If in that last sentence we substitute 'a state' for 'a class', there may be little



objection, since the moral standards generally accepted as governing the conduct of individuals are clearly quite different from those applied to the behaviour of states: a man who participated in the bombing of Hiroshima or Nagasaki, Berlin or Dresden, Vietnam or Laos, will not be accounted a mass murderer by most people, because he was acting in the interests – or at any rate on the orders – of his own state, against an 'enemy' state; and those who gave the orders suffered no criminal indictment, for in the event they were not the defeated. It would similarly be easy to find examples from the ancient world that would be universally considered morally atrocious behaviour on the part of individuals acting in their own personal interests, but were yet regarded as unobjectionable and even praiseworthy when employed in the service of the state. Most of the acts of odious injustice or unnecessary cruelty committed by fourth-century Roman generals against 'barbarians' or rebels which are noticed, for example, by Ammianus Marcellinus (a Greek historian who wrote in Latin) are recorded without any sign of disapproval;<sup>5</sup> and the same historian could mention without comment the opinion of 'lawyers of old' that sometimes even the innocent may be put to death (XXVII.ix.5), and felt no need to shed any tears over the wholesale extermination of the children of the Maratocupreni, fierce and wily robbers (XXVIII.ii.11-14). I suspect, however, that many people would be far less willing to accept the propositions advanced at the end of the last paragraph in regard to classes, which I will now demonstrate.

That slaves who rebelled, or who could even be held guilty of failing to protect their masters from being assassinated by one of their own number, were treated with pitiless ferocity by the Romans is well known: I have given one or two prominent examples in VII.i below. The relationship of the Spartans to their Helots – very much a class relationship, of exploiter to exploited – was one of quite extraordinary hostility and suspicion. In III.iv below I draw attention to the remarkable fact that each set of Spartan ephors, upon taking office, made an official declaration of war on their work-force, the Helots, so as to be able to kill any of them without trial and yet avoid incurring the religious pollution such acts would otherwise have entailed. The Greeks on the whole showed less savagery than the Romans towards their slaves; but even in Classical Athens, where we hear most about relatively good treatment of slaves, all our literature takes the flogging of slaves for granted.

Literary sources in abundance from all over the Greek world show that this form of punishment for slaves was commonplace. An epitaph on the tomb of a virtuous matron, Myro (who may be an imaginary character), by the Hellenistic poet Antipater of Sidon, describes quite casually, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, the depiction on her tomb of (among other things) a whip, as a sign that Myro was a 'just chastiser of misdeeds' – though not, of course, a 'cruel or arrogant mistress'! (*Anth. Pal.* VII.425). No one will doubt that refractory slaves were repressed without mercy, at any rate in so far as this could be done without excessive damage to the interests of their masters, whose property they were (cf. III.iv below).

Whom among our main literary sources might we have thought less likely to order a slave to be flogged than Plutarch? – a man conspicuous, surely, for his humanity. But there is a nasty little story which has come down to us from Calvisius Taurus, a friend of Plutarch's, through Aulus Gellius (NA I.xxvi.4-9).

An educated slave of Plutarch's who knew his master's treatise *On freedom from anger* (*Peri aorgēsias*, usually referred to by its Latin title, *De cohibenda ira*) protested, while being flogged, that Plutarch was being inconsistent and giving in to the very fault he had reprobated. Plutarch was quite unabashed. Insisting that he was perfectly calm, he invited the slave to continue the argument with him – in the same breath ordering the flogger to continue applying the lash. The incident was quoted by Taurus, in reply to a question by Gellius at the end of one of his philosophical lectures, and with complete approval. But we need not be surprised in the least at Plutarch's action, if we can bring ourselves to see this particular slaveowner and his slave as 'but the personifications of the economic relations that existed between them' (Marx, *Cap.* I.84-5).

The class struggle between the propertied class and those who were relatively or absolutely propertyless was also accompanied at times by atrocities on both sides: see e.g. V.ii below. When we hear of particularly murderous behaviour by those who had the upper hand in a *stasis* (a civil commotion), we can be reasonably safe in concluding that the conflict was basically between social classes, even if our information about it is not explicit.<sup>6</sup>

I forbear to cite contemporary examples of the conduct of class warfare in ways which have been widely accepted as 'necessary' but which have involved behaviour that would be condemned by everyone as morally indefensible in actions between individuals.

## (iii)

## Exploitation and the class struggle

Since the title of this book refers not merely to 'class' in the ancient Greek world but to 'the class struggle', I must explain what I mean by that expression, more precisely than in the definition I have given in Section ii of this chapter. Now there is no denying that although 'class' is an expression any of us may use without a blush, 'class struggle' is a very different matter. Merely to employ the expression 'the class struggle', in the singular, evidently seems to many people in the Western world a deplorable concession to the shade of Karl Marx; and indeed, on hearing the title of this book (as of the lectures on which it is based) some of my friends have grimaced, like one that hears tell of a hobgoblin in whose very existence he cannot bring himself to believe, and have suggested that the plural, 'class struggles', would be less objectionable. But I wished to make it perfectly clear, by my choice of title, not only that my approach is based upon what I believe to be Marx's own historical method, but also that the process of 'class struggle' which I have in mind is not something spasmodic or occasional or intermittent but a permanent feature of human society above primitive levels. Marx did not claim to have invented the concept of class struggle,<sup>1</sup> but it was he and Engels who first made of it both a keen analytical tool to facilitate historical and sociological investigation and a powerful weapon for use by all oppressed classes.

The very existence of classes, in the sense in which (following Marx, as I believe) I have defined that term, inevitably involves tension and conflict between the classes. Marxists often speak of 'contradictions' in this context. As far as I can see, although Marx himself could speak of 'contradictions' between



(for example) the relations of production and the forces of production, between the social character of production and private appropriation of its products by a few, and between private landownership and rational agriculture,<sup>2</sup> it is not at all characteristic of him to describe a situation of what I am calling class struggle as a 'contradiction': this terminology is more often found in Engels and especially in Lenin and Mao Tse-tung. I realise that Mao in particular has made some important contributions to this subject;<sup>3</sup> but I am not myself satisfied with any discussion I have seen in English of the concept of 'contradiction' in a Marxist context, and I feel reluctant to employ the term in a peculiar sense which has not yet established itself in the English language and become accepted into normal usage, as it doubtless has in French, for instance. I therefore prefer to speak of class 'struggles', 'conflicts', 'antagonisms', 'oppositions' or 'tensions', arising as (in a sense) the result of 'contradictions'. Here I think I am nearer to Marx's own usage – as when he says, for example, that the very existence of industrial capital 'implies class antagonism between capitalists and wage-labourers' (*Cap.* II.57); or when he and Engels write, in the *Communist Manifesto*, of 'modern bourgeois private property' as 'the final and most complete expression of the system of producing and appropriating products that is based on class antagonisms, on the exploitation of the many by the few' (*MECW* VI.498). Sometimes, when Marx writes of a 'Gegensatz' or 'Klassengegensatz', words which should be translated 'opposition' and 'class antagonism', the term in question will appear in a standard English translation as 'contradiction' or 'class contradiction': there are examples (as Timothy O'Hagan has pointed out to me) in *MECW* V.432, from the *German Ideology*, and in *Capital* III.386.<sup>4</sup>

As I have already indicated, Marx himself never gave any proper, systematic exposition of his theory of classes, or of class struggle, although these conceptions occur again and again in his works, and indeed occupy a central place in his thought, being omnipresent even when the specific term 'class' is not actually employed. *The Communist Manifesto*, drawn up by Marx and Engels in 1847–8, opens with the words, 'The history of all hitherto existing society [that is, all written history], as Engels added to the English edition of 1888] is the history of class struggles.'

I believe that if Marx himself had tried to give a definition of class in the most general terms he would have produced one not very different from the one I have given in Section II of this chapter. Marx began with a fundamental idea of civilised society of which class is the very kernel. It should be sufficient to single out four passages in *Capital* in which the central importance of class is made clear, although it is only in the first that the term 'class' is actually used. The first, which is very brief, is the one I have just quoted above, in which Marx says of 'industrial capital' (*Cap.* II.50 ff.) that its very 'existence implies class antagonism between capitalists and wage labourers' (id. 57). The second passage, which is also quite short, is as follows:

Whatever the social form of production, labourers and means of production always remain factors of it. But . . . for production to go on at all they must unite. The specific manner in which this union is accomplished distinguishes the different economic epochs of the structure of society from one another (*Cap.* II.36–7).

The third passage is equally brief but contains an important implication that seems to me to have been too often overlooked. (I shall soon return to it.)

The essential difference between the various economic forms of society (between, for instance, a society based on slave labour and one based on wage labour) lies only in the mode in which surplus labour is in each case extracted from the actual producer, the worker (*Cap.* I.217).

Now 'surplus labour' and (in the case of commodity-producing societies) 'surplus value' are simply the terms Marx uses for the exploitation of the primary producers by those who control the conditions of production; and indeed, the sentence I have just quoted from *Capital* I is part of Section 1 of Chapter ix (Chapter vii in German editions), headed 'The degree of exploitation of labour-power' ('Der Exploitationsgrad der Arbeitskraft'), in which Marx – dealing, of course, specifically with capitalist society – says that 'the rate of surplus value is an exact expression for the degree of exploitation of labour-power by capital, or of the worker by the capitalist' (I.218 and n.1; cf. III.385 and many other passages). The passage I have quoted, therefore, is merely another way of saying that it is the precise form of exploitation which is the distinguishing feature of each form of society (above the most primitive level, of course), whether it is, for example, a slave society or a capitalist society (cf. *Cap.* I.539–40). And class, as I have indicated, is essentially the way in which exploitation is reflected in a social structure. As it happens, Marx often fails to employ the actual expression 'exploitation' (whether by means of the more colloquial word 'Ausbeutung' or the more technical 'Exploitation') in contexts where we might have expected it, preferring to speak in thoroughly technical language of 'extraction of surplus labour' or 'of surplus value'. He evidently regarded 'Exploitation' as being strictly a French word, for in the work now generally known as *Wages, Price and Profit*, written in English in June 1865 as an address to the General Council of the First International, Marx uses the words, 'the exploitation (you must allow me this French word) of labour' (*MESW* 215). But he uses the verb 'exploitieren' and the nouns 'Exploiteur und Exploitiertem' from at least 1844 onwards,<sup>5</sup> and 'Exploitation' is found in several of his works, including all three volumes of *Capital*.<sup>6</sup> 'Ausbeutung' and its verb 'ausbeuten' are relatively rare in Marx's writings, but they do occur now and again from 1843 onwards.<sup>7</sup> (I should perhaps add that most of *Capital* was written in 1863–5; Vol. I was prepared for publication by Marx himself in 1867, Vols II and III by Engels after Marx's death in 1883.)

The longest and most explicit of my four passages, which seems to me one of the most important Marx ever wrote, comes from Vol. III of *Capital* (791–2, Chapter xlvii, Section 2):

The specific economic form in which unpaid surplus labour is pumped out [*ausgepumpt*] of the direct producers determines the relationship between those who dominate and those who are in subjection [*Herrschafts- und Knechtschaftsverhältnis*], as it grows directly out of production itself and reacts upon it as a determining element in its turn. Upon this, however, is founded the entire organisation of the economic community which grows up out of the production-relations themselves, and thereby at the same time its specific political form. It is always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the immediate producers – a relation always naturally corresponding to a definite stage in the development of the nature and method of labour and consequently of its social productivity – which reveals the innermost secret, the hidden foundation of the entire social structure and therefore also of the political form of the relations of sovereignty and dependence [*Souveränitäts- und Abhängigkeitsverhältnis*], in short, the



corresponding specific form of the State. This does not prevent the same economic basis – the same as far as its main conditions are concerned – owing to innumerable different empirical circumstances, natural environment, racial peculiarities, external historical influences etc., from manifesting infinite variations and gradations of aspect, which can be grasped only by analysis of the empirically given circumstances. (I have slightly altered the standard translation, after studying the German text, MEW XXV. 799-800.)"

\* \* \* \* \*

I have waited until now to state one major part of my theory of class, because I wished to show that it is implicit in Marx's own writings, and this emerges most clearly from the last two passages in *Capital* that I have just quoted (I.217 and III.791-2). As I claim to have found the theory in Marx, I cannot of course pretend that it is new; but I have never seen it stated clearly and explicitly. My point is that the most significant distinguishing feature of each social formation, each 'mode of production' (cf. the end of IV.v below), is not so much *how the bulk of the labour of production is done*, as *how the dominant propertied classes*, controlling the conditions of production, *ensure the extraction of the surplus* which makes their own leisured existence possible. That was the view of Marx, which I follow. In the last of the four passages from *Capital* quoted above, this is made abundantly clear; and although the sense of the third passage (*Cap.* I.217) is perhaps not so immediately obvious, yet it is certainly saying the same thing, as can be seen a little more easily if we follow rather more closely the original German text (MEW XXIII.231): 'Only the form in which this surplus labour is extracted from the immediate producer, the worker, distinguishes the economic forms of society, for example the society of slavery from that of wage labour.' What I think has been often overlooked is that what Marx is concentrating on as the really distinctive feature of each society is not the way in which the bulk of the labour of production is done, but how the extraction of the surplus from the immediate producer is secured. Now as a consequence of this we are justified in saying that the Greek and Roman world was a 'slave economy', in the sense that it was characterised by *unfree labour* (*direkte Zwangsarbeit*, 'direct compulsory labour', in Marx's phrase: see below), in which actual slavery (' chattel slavery') played a central role. Our justification will be that that was the main way in which the dominant propertied classes of the ancient world derived their surplus, whether or not the greater share in *total* production was due to unfree labour. In point of fact, until round about A.D. 300 the small, free, independent producers (mainly peasants, with artisans and traders) who worked at or near subsistence level and were neither slaves nor serfs (cf. III.iv below) must have formed an actual majority of the population in most parts of the Greek (and Roman) world at most times, and must have been responsible for a substantial proportion of its total production – the greater part of it, indeed, except in special cases, above all Italy in the last century B.C., when masses of cheap slaves were available (cf. IV.iii below), and conceivably at Athens and a few other Greek cities in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C., when also slaves were very cheap. (I shall deal with the position of the peasantry and the other free independent producers in Chapter IV.) We can speak of the ancient Greek world, then, as a 'slave economy' (in my broad sense), in spite of the fact that it was always, or almost always, a minority of the free population (virtually what

I am calling 'the propertied class': see III.ii below) which exploited unfree labour on any significant scale, and that the majority – often the great majority – of free Greeks (and Romans) were peasants utilising hardly more than their own labour and that of their families and therefore living not very much above subsistence level.

It was precisely of these peasants that Aristotle was thinking when he spoke of the lack of slaves (the *adoulia*) of the propertyless (the *aporoî*) and said that it was because of this lack of slaves that they had to 'use their wives and children in the role of assistants' (*hōsper akolouthois*: *Pol.* VI.8, 1323<sup>a</sup>5-6). Elsewhere he says that for the poor (the *penētes* – a word commonly used to indicate a less extreme degree of poverty than *aporoî*) 'the ox serves in place of a slave' (*oiketēs*, I.2, 1252<sup>b</sup>12). The unspoken assumption is that the men of property will own and use slaves.

Continuing the exposition of the theory I have sketched, I wish to make explicit another fact that is never stated clearly enough: that an individual or a class can obtain a surplus in only a limited number of ways, which can be summarised under three main headings:

1. The surplus can be extracted by the exploitation of wage labour, as in the modern capitalist world.
2. The exploitation can be of unfree labour, which may be of (a) chattel slaves, (b) serfs, or (c) debt bondsmen, or a combination of any two or all three of these.
3. A surplus can be obtained by the letting of land and house property to leasehold tenants, in return for some kind of rent, in money, kind or services.

I need do no more than mention the possibility that a class which controls a state machine may collectively extract a surplus, either by internal taxation and the imposition of compulsory state services (for transport, digging canals, repairing roads and the like), or by a policy of imperialism, exploiting some other country by conquest followed either by immediate plunder or by the levying of tribute.

Now before the age of complete automation, which has not even yet arrived, the individual members of a dominant class can hardly obtain a *substantial* surplus except by the employment of 'free' wage labour or some form of unfree labour (nos. 1 and 2 above), supplemented by the taxation and compulsory services which they may exact collectively. For obvious reasons, resorting to the third of my numbered alternatives and letting land to free tenants is not likely to yield the same rate of surplus, even if the small producers are subjected to high rents as well as political control: to ensure a really large surplus for a long period, the bulk of the primary producers must either be made to give unfree labour, under the constraint of slavery or serfdom or debt bondage, or they must be driven to sell their labour power for a wage. In antiquity, since free wage labour was normally unskilled and was not available in any great quantity (see III.vi below), there was no alternative but unfree labour; and it was this source from which the propertied classes of antiquity derived their surpluses. The ancient Greek (and Roman) world was indeed a 'slave-owning society' or 'slave economy' (in my sense); *Sklavenhaltergesellschaft*, *Sklavenhalterordnung* are the familiar German words.

Marx refers again and again to the world of the Greeks and Romans, in its full



development, as a 'slave economy' or 'slave system' (see e.g. *Cap.* III.332, 384-5, 594, 595); and he can say that 'slavery or serfdom [*Leibeigenschaft*] form the broad foundation of social production in antiquity and during the Middle Ages' (*Cap.* III.831). Above all I would draw attention to what seems to me his most technically correct statement on this subject: 'Direct forced labour [*direkte Zwangsarbeit*] is the foundation of the ancient world' (*Grundrisse* 156=E.T. 245). Yet he also realised the important role played, especially in the early stages of the Greek and Roman world, by peasant producers. Thus he could say that 'the form of free self-managing peasant proprietorship of land parcels as the prevailing, normal form constitutes . . . the economic foundation of society during the best periods of Classical antiquity' (*Cap.* III.806, cf. 595), and that 'peasant agriculture on a small scale and the carrying on of independent handicrafts . . . form the economic foundation of the Classical communities at their best, . . . before slavery had seized on production in earnest' (*Cap.* I.334 n.3).

Anyone to whom the statements I have just made about the character of Classical civilisation as a slave-owning society seem surprising can easily set his mind at rest by looking at other slave-owning societies. It will be sufficient to give just one example: the American Old South. I am not pretending that the Old South was in any sense 'typical'; but comparison with it will serve to establish my main point, which is that we are perfectly entitled according to common parlance to speak of a society as a 'slaveowning' one even though its slaves constitute much less than half the population and slaveowners are quite a small minority. A leading American historian, Carl N. Degler, records that in the Old South in 1860 'slaves made up less than a third of the population of the region; fewer than a quarter of the Southern families owned a single slave, let alone a gang of them'. And 'in the antebellum South less than 3 per cent of the slaveholders, something like six-tenths of 1 per cent of all Southern families, owned fifty or more slaves'.

Nevertheless, Degler insists (as do all other historians) on treating the Old South as a slave society in the full sense; and he points out the usefulness of a comparison with the situation in Classical antiquity. In his article, he was giving a much-needed lesson in historical method to an American ancient historian, Chester G. Starr, who failed to realise what can be learnt from comparative studies of slavery and who greatly underestimated the contribution of slavery to Classical civilisation.<sup>9</sup> Starr was prepared to say that slavery was not 'basic' to the ancient economy, on the ground apparently that slaves did not make up a majority of the labour force or do most of the work – a situation which of course was equally true of the Old South. Degler rightly replied that 'the really significant question about the place of slavery in antiquity is not "Did slaves do most of the work?" but "What role did they play in the economic process?"'. For my own part, I find Degler's question, although on the right lines, cast in so general a form that it is hard to give a succinct answer to it. I would make it much more specific, and ask, 'What role was played by slaves – or rather (as I would prefer to put it) by *unfree labour* – in supplying the dominant propertied classes with their surplus?' The answer is clear: a fundamental and – in the conditions of the time – an irreplaceable one.

It may be useful if I make a few quotations at this point from one of the major works of recent years on North American slavery, which I mentioned in Section i

of this chapter: Kenneth Stampp's *The Peculiar Institution*. Using the official Federal Census figures, he points out that

The [Old] South was not simply – or even chiefly – a land of planters, slaves, and degraded 'poor whites'. Together these three groups constituted less than half of the total southern population. Most of the remaining Southerners (and the largest single group) were independent yeoman farmers of varying degrees of affluence. If there were such a thing as a 'typical' antebellum Southerner, he belonged to the class of landowning small farmers who tilled their own fields, usually without any help except from their wives and children . . . [I myself would be tempted to say much the same of 'the typical Greek!'] . . . In 1860, there were in the South 385,000 owners of slaves distributed among 1,516,000 free families. Nearly three-fourths of all free Southerners had no connection with slavery through either family ties or direct ownership. The 'typical' Southerner was not only a small farmer but also a nonslaveholder (*PI* 29-30).

Of the slaveholders,

72% held less than ten [slaves], and almost 50% held less than five (*PI* 30).

And yet,

Whatever the reason, most of the nonslaveholders seemed to feel that their interest required them to defend the peculiar institution [slavery as it existed in the Old South] (*PI* 33).

\* \* \* \* \*

I have already dealt briefly (in I.iv above) with Marx as a Classical scholar and with some aspects of his outlook and method. He formulated a large part of the main outlines of his whole system of ideas, including the concepts of class and exploitation, between the years 1843 and 1847, although of course many details and refinements and even some major features emerged only later. Virtually all the essential ideas comprised in what has come to be known as 'historical materialism' (see I.iv above) appear in some form in the works, published and unpublished, which were written during those years, especially Marx's 'Introduction to a contribution to the critique [then unpublished] of Hegel's philosophy of law' and *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* (both of 1844), the *German Ideology* (a joint work of Marx and Engels, of 1845-6), and *The Poverty of Philosophy*, written by Marx in French in 1847. Hegelian as his cast of mind was from the first in some ways, Marx did not by any means develop his ideas in a purely theoretical manner: he was already proceeding in a completely different way from Hegel. Shortly before he even began his serious study of economics he read a large quantity of historical material: the notebooks he compiled while staying at his mother-in-law's house at Kreuznach in the summer of 1843 show him studying not merely political theorists such as Machiavelli, Montesquieu and Rousseau, but a considerable amount of history, mainly recent – that of England, France, Germany, Sweden, Venice and the United States. Details of the 'Kreuznacher Exzerpte' are published in *MEGA* I.i.2 (1929) 98, 118-36. It is a great pity that the English *Collected Works* contain only one brief extract from the Kreuznach notebooks, about half a page in length (*MECW* III.130), and give no idea at all of the scope of the works excerpted by Marx. Yet, as David McLellan has said, 'It was his reading of the history of the French Revolution in the summer of 1843 that showed him the role of class struggle in social development' (*KMLT* 95). I am myself convinced that another seminal influence in the



development by Marx of a theory of class struggle was his reading during his student years of Aristotle's *Politics*, a work which shows some striking analogies to Marx in its analysis of Greek society (see Section iv of this chapter). During 1844 and early 1845 Marx also read and excerpted many works by leading classical economists: Adam Smith, David Ricardo, James Mill, J. R. McCulloch, J. B. Say, Destutt de Tracy and others (see *MEGA* I.iii.409-583). In the Preface to the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* of 1844 Marx insisted that his results had been obtained 'by means of a wholly empirical analysis based on a conscientious critical study of political economy' (*MECW* III.231). And in the *German Ideology* of 1845-6, just after the well-known passage sketching the series of 'modes of production', Marx and Engels declare that 'Empirical observation must in each separate instance bring out empirically, and without any mystification and speculation, the connection of the social and political structure with production' (*MECW* V.35; cf. 36-7, 236 etc.).

Another important influence was at work on Marx from soon after his arrival in Paris in October 1843: the French working-class movement. 'You would have to attend one of the meetings of the French workers,' Marx wrote in a letter to Feuerbach on 11 August 1844, 'to appreciate the pure freshness, the nobility which burst forth from these toil-worm men' (*MECW* III.355). And in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* he uses the same language. 'The most splendid results are to be observed when French socialist workers [*ouvriers*] are seen together . . . The brotherhood of man is no mere phrase with them, but a fact of life, and the nobility of man shines upon us from their work-hardened bodies' (id. 313). Again, in *The Holy Family* (a joint work with Engels, dating from 1845) Marx wrote, 'One must know the studiousness, the craving for knowledge, the moral energy and the unceasing urge for development of the French and English workers to be able to form an idea of the human nobility of this movement' (*MECW* IV.84). Marx also attended meetings of some of the German immigrant workers in Paris, of whom there were many tens of thousands, and got to know their leaders (McLellan, *KMLT* 87). His second article for the *Deutsch-französische Jahrbücher*, namely the brilliant 'Introduction to a contribution to the critique of Hegel's philosophy of law' (*MECW* III.175-87), written soon after his arrival in Paris, contains, in its concluding pages, his first clear expression of the view that the emancipation of capitalist society can come about only through the proletariat. The concept of class struggle appears explicitly in this article (see esp. id. 185-6); and in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, although the actual term 'class' is not often used (see, however, id. 266, 270 etc.), we find frequent references to antagonistic relationships which Marx speaks of in the article just mentioned and elsewhere in terms of class struggle – and, interestingly enough for the ancient historian, these antagonistic relationships are not limited to those between capitalist and worker but include also those between landlord and tenant, landowner and farm labourer. Marx can say that 'the rent of land is established as a result of the struggle between tenant and landlord. We find that the hostile antagonism of interests, the struggle, the war [*den feindlichen Gegensatz der Interessen, den Kampf, den Krieg*] is recognised throughout political economy as the basis of social organisation' (id. 260=*MEGA* I.iii.69). He goes on to compare the hostility of interest between the landowner and his farm worker with that between the industrialist and the factory worker;

and he shows that the relationship between landowner and farm worker can equally be 'reduced to the economic relationship of exploiter and exploited' (*MECW* III.263, 267).

To those who have not studied the development of Marx's thought in the 1840s I should like to recommend two recent works in particular. There is a good brief sketch of the emergence of Marx's ideas in the economic sphere in Ronald L. Meek, *Studies in the Labour Theory of Value* (2nd edition, 1973) 121-56 (esp. 129-46); cf. 157-200 for later developments. And Richard N. Hunt, *The Political Ideas of Marx and Engels, I. Marxism and Totalitarian Democracy 1818-1850* (Pittsburgh, 1974; London, 1975) gives a very sympathetic account of the growth of the political ideas of Marx and Engels in the 1840s (see esp. 26-131).

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I have found that some people disapprove of my using the expression 'class struggle' for situations in which there may be no explicit common awareness of class on either side, no specifically political struggle at all, and perhaps even little consciousness of struggle of any kind. I concede that the term 'class struggle' is not a very happy one when used in my sense for such situations, but I do not see how we can avoid using it in this way: the opening sentence of the *Communist Manifesto* and the whole type of thinking associated with it have made this inevitable. To adopt the very common conception of class struggle which refuses to regard it as such unless it includes class consciousness and active political conflict (as some Marxists do) is to water it down to the point where it virtually disappears in many situations. It is then possible to deny altogether the very existence of class struggle today in the United States of America or between employers and immigrant workers in northern Europe (contrast the end of this section), and between masters and slaves in antiquity, merely because in each case the exploited class concerned does not or did not have any 'class consciousness' or take any political action in common except on very rare occasions and to a very limited degree. But this, I would say, makes nonsense not merely of *The Communist Manifesto* but of the greater part of Marx's work. Bring back exploitation as the hallmark of class, and at once class struggle is in the forefront, as it should be. This, of course, is highly objectionable to those who have an interest (or believe themselves to have an interest) in preserving the capitalist system: they can no longer laugh off the class struggle as a figment of the Marxist imagination or at most a deplorable and adventitious phenomenon which would surely disappear of its own accord if only everyone would simply agree on its non-existence.

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I wish now to examine the position of some modern writers who have seriously misconceived Marx's conception of class in one way or another, and consequently have either rejected his approach altogether or, if they have believed themselves to be utilising it (at least in some degree), have misapplied it. In most cases their mistakes have been due largely to the assumption that class struggle 'must be' something of an essentially political nature. I discuss them here only in so far as they have failed to understand Marx or have misinterpreted his position. In so far as they advance rival theories of their own I shall deal with them in Section v of this chapter.



I begin with M. I. Finley's *The Ancient Economy* (1973), which has made a real contribution to our knowledge of ancient social history, in spite of its serious defects, which include a cavalier rejection of Marx's whole concept of class as an instrument of analysis, for reasons I would have to describe as frivolous did they not reveal a surprising lack of knowledge of some of Marx's basic concepts, and of the place of the slave, compared with the free wage-labourer, in Marx's economic analysis. In Section v of this chapter I shall discuss Finley's attempt to substitute for Marx's class analysis a scheme of social 'stratification' in terms of what he himself calls 'a spectrum of statuses and orders' (AE 67-8); here I shall concentrate on his reasons for rejecting a Marxist approach in general. His statement, 'Invariably, what are conventionally called "class struggles" in antiquity prove to be conflicts between groups at different points in the spectrum [of statuses and orders] disputing the distribution of specific rights and privileges' (AE 68), shows clearly that in Finley's mind 'class struggles' are primarily if not solely political in character: they concern 'the distribution of specific rights and privileges'. On p.49 Finley first purports to describe 'the Marxist concept of class', in the words, 'Men are classed according to their relation to the means of production, first between those who do and those who do not own the means of production; second, among the former, between those who work themselves and those who live off the labour of others'. He then claims that on Marx's analysis 'the slave and the free wage labourer would then be members of the same class, on a mechanical interpretation [my italics], as would the richest senator and the non-working owner of a small pottery'; and he adds, 'That does not seem a very sensible way to analyse ancient society.'<sup>10</sup> Marx would surely have been shocked, as many of us are, by these suppositions. Even on the most 'mechanical interpretation' of what Marx called 'the relations of production' (a concept which is wider and more complex than mere 'ownership of the means of production'),<sup>11</sup> the free wage-labourer, who has his own labour-power to sell, obviously occupies a completely different position from the slave, who is the property of his master, a mere 'animate tool' (*empsychon organon*), as Aristotle calls him.<sup>12</sup> And the slave (with working animals and the land itself) is placed specifically by Marx among the 'instruments of labour' which form an important category of the 'means of production' and are therefore a part of 'fixed capital' and of Marx's 'constant capital', whereas the free wage-labourer (part of 'circulating capital') constitutes Marx's 'variable capital' – a profound difference in Marx's eyes. The subject is perhaps rather complicated at first sight: I have therefore dealt with it fully in Appendix I, with copious references to the various works of Marx in which these questions are dealt with.

There can be no possible doubt, then, that in Marx's mind wage labour and slave labour belong to completely different categories, whether in a predominantly 'slave society' or in a capitalist society which also uses slave labour. Moreover, in Marx's scheme of things, the *nature* and the *quantity* of exploitation – *how*, and *how much*, one exploits or is exploited – are among the decisive elements in fixing a man's position in the whole system of property-relations. Finley's very rich senator, as the owner of a vast quantity of landed property and the exploiter of a large amount of slave labour and/or numerous tenants or *coloni*, would be in a totally different category from the owner of a small pottery – or even, for that matter, a small peasant freeholder, a creature whom Marx

often distinguished sharply from the great landowner, for example in his writings on nineteenth-century France, and most usefully (for our present purposes) in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, where he says, 'The small landed proprietor working on his own land stands to the big landowner in the same relation as an artisan possessing his own tool to the factory owner', and 'In general, the relationship of large and small landed property is like that of big and small capital' (MECW III.264). Engels, too, in one of his most penetrating works, *The Peasant Question in France and Germany*, draws a careful distinction between big and middle peasants who do exploit the labour of others, and small peasants who do not (see esp. MESW 624-6, 634-9, and in more detail IV.ii below). It matters hardly at all, of course, on a Marxist analysis, whether a man who exploits the labour of others, by owning or employing slaves or serfs or hired hands, actually works beside them himself or not: his class position depends upon whether he is able to exploit, and does exploit, the labour of others; and if he does this, then whether or not he works himself will be almost irrelevant, unless of course he needs to work because he is able to exploit the labour of others to only a small degree.

The next misinterpretation of Marx's concept of class which I intend to discuss is that of Dahrendorf, who is certainly less casual about the thought of Marx than Finley and has at least taken some care in reconstructing it, but who is misled by much the same assumption as Finley: that for Marx class struggle is something entirely political.

Dahrendorf's position is explained at length in his important book, *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society*, which appeared in 1959 in a revised and expanded version (by the author himself) of the German original, *Soziale Klassen und Klassenkonflikt in der industriellen Gesellschaft* (1957). The opening chapter of this book, entitled 'Karl Marx's model of the class society', seeks (on pp.9-18) to reconstruct 'the unwritten 52nd chapter of Volume III of Marx's *Capital*', which has the title 'Classes' but breaks off after scarcely more than a page (Cap. III. 885-6), when Marx had done little more than ask himself 'the first question to be answered' – namely, 'What constitutes a class?' – and answer that 'the reply to this follows naturally from the reply to another question, namely: What makes wage-labourers, capitalists and landlords constitute the three great social classes?'. After that Marx proceeds to rebut the answer that he thought might be given 'at first glance': namely, 'the identity of revenues and sources of revenue', which he proceeds to specify as 'wages, profit and ground-rent respectively'. A few lines later, when he is in the act of arguing against this answer, the manuscript breaks off. Dahrendorf makes an attempt, most praiseworthy in principle, to complete the chapter: he prints a large number of quotations from Marx (in italics), and supplies a roughly equal amount of material on his own initiative. Much of this undertaking is conducted fairly and quite shrewdly, with little serious distortion until disaster comes suddenly and irretrievably, with the statement (p.16),

The formation of classes always means the organisation of common interests in the sphere of politics. The point needs to be emphasised. Classes are political groups united by a common interest. *The struggle between two classes is a political struggle.* We therefore speak of classes only in the realm of political conflict.

I reproduce the italics by which Dahrendorf indicates (see above) that he is



quoting from Marx himself, in this case a passage from just before the end of *The Poverty of Philosophy*, written early in 1847 in French, as *La Misère de la philosophie*. But the passage appears in a different light when it is read in context and as what it is: the last sentence at the end of the following paragraph (from which, for some reason, Dahrendorf cites elsewhere in his book only the third sentence, CCCIS 14):

Economic conditions had first transformed the mass of the people of the country into workers. The domination of capital has created for this mass a common situation, common interests. This mass is thus already a class as against capital, but not yet for itself. In the struggle . . . this mass becomes united, and constitutes itself as a class for itself. The interests it defends become class interests. But the struggle of class against class is a political struggle (MECW VI.211=MEGA I.vi.226).

The context is the early development of large-scale industry under capitalism. I will only remark here that it would be absurd to pretend that for Marx the mass of workers under early capitalism is 'not a class' at all: it is merely that until it becomes united and self-conscious it is 'not a class for itself' (*pour elle-même*: the phrase is usually quoted in German, as *für sich*). When, earlier in *The Poverty of Philosophy* (MECW VI.177), Marx speaks of the stage of class struggle at which 'the proletariat is not yet sufficiently developed to constitute itself as a class [he surely means 'a class for itself!'], . . . the very struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie has not yet assumed a political character', it is clear that in his mind proletariat and bourgeoisie already existed as classes and even that there was a class struggle between them, although it had 'not yet assumed a political character'.

Before we can see this passage in the proper light, it needs to be placed beside another, a famous paragraph a few pages before the end of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), following soon after the statement 'Bonaparte represents a class, and the most numerous class of French society at that, the small-holding [Parzellen] peasants'. After an intervening paragraph Marx sets out to explain how these small peasants in one sense did, and in another did not, form a class (the italics are mine):

The small-holding peasants form a vast mass, the members of which live in similar conditions but without entering into manifold relations with one another. Their mode of production isolates them from one another . . . The isolation is increased by France's bad means of communication and by the poverty of the peasants . . . Each individual peasant family is almost self-sufficient . . . A smallholding, a peasant and his family; alongside them another smallholding, another peasant and another family. A few score of these make up a village, and a few score of villages make up a Department. In this way, the great mass of the French nation is formed by simple addition of homologous magnitudes, much as potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes. *Insofar as* millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests and their culture from those of the other classes, and put them in hostile opposition to the latter, *they form a class*. *Insofar as* there is merely a local interconnection among these small-holding peasants, and the identity of their interests begets no community, no national bond and no political organisation among them, *they do not form a class*. They are consequently incapable of enforcing their class interests in their own name, whether through a parliament or through a convention. They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented. Their representative must at the same time appear as their master, as an authority over them, as an unlimited governmental power that protects them against the other classes and sends them rain and sunshine from above. The political influence of the small-

holding peasants, therefore, finds its final expression in the executive power subordinating society to itself (MECW XI.187-8).

I have quoted nearly the whole of this long paragraph because it is relevant, as we shall see in V.i below, to the appearance of the early Greek 'tyrants'.

Let us take these two passages, from *The Poverty of Philosophy* and *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, together. It is perfectly clear that Marx considered both the workers under early capitalism and the small French peasants of the mid-nineteenth century to be a class: he gives that title again and again to both groups, not only in the two works from which I have just been quoting but elsewhere. In both passages, the apparent contradiction between the two parts of the statement can be resolved quite satisfactorily by taking the question at issue as one of definition. If we define a class according to one set of characteristics, Marx is saying, the workers under early capitalism or the French peasants of his day would fall within the definition; but if we substitute another set of characteristics in our definition, they would then fall outside it. The fact that a class in the most complete sense ('for itself', or whatever) could be expected to fulfil the second definition, and that Marx felt it would otherwise lack something of the full set of attributes that a class is capable of attaining, must not blind us to the fact that for Marx a class could perfectly well exist as such before it developed the second set of characteristics – indeed, he says as much in both our passages: the workers are already 'a class as against capital'; the French peasants, who live under particular conditions of existence that give them a special mode of life, interests and culture, different from those of other classes, to whom they are in hostile opposition, *do form a class*. It would be perverse to deny this. Again, Marx could say in 1847 that 'the German bourgeoisie already finds itself in conflict with the proletariat even before being politically constituted as a class' (MECW VI.332).

Sometimes, when Marx is dealing with a specific situation, he will speak loosely of class and class struggle as if these terms applied mainly or even only to overt political conflicts. Towards the middle of the fifth chapter of *The Eighteenth Brumaire* he can even say that 'the bourgeoisie had done away with the class struggle for the moment by abolishing universal suffrage' (MECW XI.153; cf. Section ii above). A number of other such passages could be collected. In the Preface to the second German edition (1869) of *The Eighteenth Brumaire* Marx could altogether forget the antithesis formulated near the end of that work, which I quoted a moment ago, and actually say, 'In ancient Rome the class struggle took place *only* within a privileged minority, between the free rich and the free poor [he means rich and poor citizens], while the great productive mass of the population, the slaves, formed the purely passive pedestal for these conflicts.' And in a letter to Engels dated 8 March 1855 he gives a brief general characterisation of the internal history of the Roman Republic as 'the struggle of small with large landed property, specifically modified, of course, by slave conditions' (MEW XXVIII.439): once more, the class struggle takes place only within the citizen class, for only Roman citizens could own land within the boundaries of the Roman State. But these are isolated remarks which are of trivial importance compared with the main stream of Marx's thought – concentrated, as I have shown, in the passages from *Capital* I, II and III quoted towards the beginning of this section, and exemplified also in very many other contexts.



It is open to anyone, of course, to reject Marx's categories, provided he makes it clear that that is what he is doing, as indeed Finley and Dahrendorf have done.

I need say little more about Dahrendorf's treatment of Marx's theory of class. I would emphasise that – astonishingly enough – it is not just class *struggle* which Dahrendorf wishes to confine to the political plane: Marx's classes *exist* for him *only in so far as they conduct political struggle*, as the passage I have quoted above (from CCCIS 16) demonstrates: for him, Marx's classes 'are political groups', and he will 'speak of classes *only* in the realm of political conflict'. Yet Dahrendorf himself quotes several texts from Marx which falsify this, in particular the very important one from *Capital* III (791–2) which I have set out at length above, and the statement that 'the German bourgeoisie stands in opposition to the proletariat *before* it has organised itself as a class in the political sphere' (my italics) – which Dahrendorf tries to weaken by prefacing it with the misleading gloss, 'In a sense, class interests precede the formation of classes'! (CCCIS 14).

Among many other passages which might be cited in support of the position I am taking here on Marx's view of class is his letter to Bolte of 23 November 1871, the relevance of which has been pointed out to me by Timothy O'Hagan. Near the end of this letter, under the heading 'N.B. as to political movement', Marx says that 'every movement in which the working class comes out as a class against the ruling classes', for example in order to agitate for a general law enforcing the eight-hour day, 'is a political movement', whereas 'the attempt in a particular factory or even in a particular trade to force a shorter working day out of individual capitalists by strikes, etc., is a purely economic movement'. And in his final paragraph Marx speaks of the necessity for training, 'where the working class is not yet far enough advanced in its organisation to undertake a decisive campaign against the collective power, i.e., the political power of the ruling classes' (MESC 328–9). This makes it perfectly clear that in Marx's eyes the working class exists as such at the economic level, and that sections of it can carry on activities at that level in furtherance of their interests, over against their employers, before it develops sufficient organisation to enable it to become active in the mass at the political level.

\* \* \* \* \*

On the very first page of the Preface to his major work, *The Making of the English Working Class*, E. P. Thompson, a contemporary English Marxist historian who has made a notable contribution to nineteenth-century social history, declares that 'Class happens when [my italics] some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs. The class experience is largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born – or enter involuntarily.'<sup>13</sup> For Thompson, clearly, it is the second half of Marx's statement at the end of *The Eighteenth Brumaire* which alone is significant; the first half has simply disappeared. Another leading English Marxist historian, E. J. Hobsbawm, in an essay entitled 'Class consciousness in history',<sup>14</sup> begins by explicitly recognising that Marx's uses of the term 'class' divide into two main categories, in one of which classes are above all 'groups of exploiters and exploited'; but he mistakenly sees this usage as belonging to 'what we might call

Marx's macro-theory', and he thinks that 'for the purposes of the historian, i.e., the student of micro-history, or of history "as it happened" . . . as distinct from the general and rather abstract models of the historical transformation of societies', it is the other category which is relevant: one which takes account of class consciousness. For the historian, he believes, 'class and the problem of class consciousness are inseparable . . . Class in the full sense only comes into existence at the historical moment when classes begin to acquire consciousness of themselves as such'. I accept the last sentence (giving the words 'in the full sense' the greatest possible weight), but not the words I have italicised, which would make it seldom possible for us to speak of 'class' in the ancient world at all, except in relation to certain ruling classes. When Hobsbawm speaks of 'the historian', in the passage I have quoted, he is really thinking only in terms of the historian of modern times: of him alone is his statement true, if at all. I realise that Marx himself in certain exceptional passages (see the quotations above from *The Eighteenth Brumaire* and its Preface, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, and the letter to Engels) gives evidence of adopting something very like Hobsbawm's position; but, as I have shown, such an attitude is not really consistent with the fundamentals of Marx's thought. I myself used to pay much more attention to these exceptional passages than I do now.

It is doubtless also under the influence of these passages that a number of writers in French in recent years, who are not entirely out of sympathy with what they believe to be Marx's concept of classes and class struggle, have taken up a position which is essentially very far removed from that of Marx. Thus J.-P. Vernant, in an article entitled 'Remarques sur la lutte de classe dans la Grèce ancienne', in *Eirene* 4 (1965) 5–19, which has recently been translated into English,<sup>15</sup> took over an unfortunate distinction established in a paper published two years earlier by Charles Parain<sup>16</sup> between a 'fundamental contradiction' and a 'principal or dominant contradiction' (pp. 6, 12), and spoke of the opposition between slaves and their masters as the 'fundamental contradiction' of Greek slaveowning society but not its 'principal contradiction' (pp. 17–19): the latter he saw in a class struggle inside the citizen body only, between rich and poor (p. 17, cf. 11). Whether Parain or Vernant would allow Greek slaves to count as a class at all in Marx's sense is not clear to me. Quite apart from any dissatisfaction I may feel with the use of the word 'contradiction' in this sense (its use is certainly less well established in English than in French: see the beginning of this section), I must say emphatically that the distinction between 'fundamental contradiction' and 'principal (or dominant) contradiction' is mere phrase-making and conveys no useful idea.

Pierre Vidal-Naquet, in an article called 'Les esclaves grecs étaient-ils une classe?', in *Raison présente* 6 (1968) 103–12, follows Vernant in the main but goes still further away from Marx, with whom he seems ill acquainted. While admitting that 'the opposition between masters and slaves is indeed the fundamental contradiction of the ancient world' (p. 108), but denying (like Vernant) that it is legitimate to speak of Greek slaves as participating in class conflicts, he explicitly refuses to accept the slaves as a class at all (see esp. his p. 105). But Vidal-Naquet, in seeking to show that there is authority in Marx himself for his own denial that Greek slaves formed a class, has made a most misleading selective quotation from the passage near the end of *The Eighteenth Brumaire*



which I cited at length earlier, on whether the mid-nineteenth-century French peasantry formed a class. He cites only the second half of the antithesis, in which Marx declares that *in respect of certain characteristics* the French peasants did not form a class; he ignores the first half, in which Marx says that because of certain other characteristics they *did* form a class! And, as I said earlier, Marx repeatedly refers to those peasants as a class; and the few passages in which he speaks loosely of class and class struggle in particular situations as if these terms applied only to *overt political* conflicts are of minor importance compared with the main stream of his thought.

Austin and Vidal-Naquet, in the recent collection of ancient texts in translation (with an interesting Introduction) to which I made a brief reference in I.iv above, have given an account of class and class struggle in the Greek world during the Archaic and Classical periods which to me is unsatisfactory in the extreme (ESHAG 20 ff.). They entirely reject Marx's class *analysis*, at least as far as the ancient Greek world is concerned (it is not clear to me whether they would accept it for any other period of history); but they hardly make it clear whether this is because they dislike his *whole concept* of class or whether it is because they think that concept is merely *inapplicable to the particular situation* existing in the Greek world. At no point, unfortunately, do they give a definition of class as they themselves wish to conceive it: this makes it hard to examine their argument rigorously. Certainly they reject, at least for the ancient Greek world, those two of their 'three fundamental representations' of the notion of a social class which they themselves identify as the contributions of Marx: namely, position in 'the relations of production', and 'class consciousness: community of interests, development of a common vocabulary and programme, and the putting into practice of this programme in political and social action' (ESHAG 21, cf. 22, 23). They are very sure that slaves 'did not . . . constitute a class', and that we must 'reject completely the conception often expressed according to which the struggle between masters and slaves was the manifestation of class struggle in antiquity' (ESHAG 22, 23). Here of course they are flatly contradicting Marx, who certainly regarded slaves as a class, involved in class struggles. They have failed to grasp the fundamental position which Marx states so clearly in the passages I have quoted from *Capital* near the beginning of this section, and which he and Engels take for granted throughout their works, from the *German Ideology* and the *Communist Manifesto* onwards. At the beginning of the *Manifesto*, for instance, the very first example given of class struggles is that between 'free man and slave' – in Classical antiquity, clearly (MECW VI.482). And in the *German Ideology* (MECW V.33) Marx and Engels can speak of 'completely developed class relations between citizens and slaves' in the ancient city-state. (I will merely remark here, and explain presently, that Marx and Engels ought, according to their own principles, to have spoken in both cases of class relations between 'slaveowners and slaves'.) Non-Marxist writers are of course perfectly entitled to reject Marx's concept of class and substitute another – although one may hope that they will then provide their own definition. Austin and Vidal-Naquet, following Aristotle, are at any rate willing to accept the existence of what they call class struggles in the Greek world, in the sense of 'antagonism . . . between the propertied and the non-propertied'; and they go on to say that 'the antagonism between the propertied minority and the non-propertied majority

was fundamental in Greek class struggles', although 'class struggles could be expressed between citizens only' (ESHAG 23, 24). Here, if we modify their terminology to make it refer only to 'active political class struggles', they are on the right track; and in their selection of texts they provide some useful illustrations.

Occasionally one comes across the further argument that slaves should not be treated as a class at all, in the Marxist sense, because their condition could vary so greatly, from the mine slave, worked to death, perhaps, in a few months, or the drudge who spent almost every waking hour toiling in the fields or the house, to the great imperial slave of the Roman period who, like Musicus Scurranus or Rotundus Drusillianus (mentioned in III.iv below), could acquire considerable wealth even before the manumission he might confidently expect. This is patently fallacious. Of course slaves can be treated for many important purposes as a class, in spite of all the differences between them, just as one can legitimately speak of a 'propertied class', in my sense (see III.ii below), even though some members of it would be hundreds or even thousands of times as rich as others. Even among senators the range of wealth in the early Principate was from HS 1 million to something like 400 million; and if many city councillors (to be counted generally as members of my 'propertied class'; cf. VIII.ii below) owned little more than the HS 100,000 which was the minimum qualification for a decurion in some Roman towns, then the richest Romans would have had fortunes thousands of times as large (cf. Duncan-Jones, *EREQS* 343, with 147–8, 243). The 'propertied class' certainly needs to be spoken of as such when, for example, it is being set over against propertyless wage-labourers or slaves. Similarly, slaves can be considered on occasion as a single class in relation to slaveowners, who exploited them (and who virtually coincided with my 'propertied class'), or in contrast to wage-labourers, who were exploited by members of the propertied class in a very different way; but of course the slaves sometimes need to be subdivided, just like the propertied class, when we wish to take account of factors that distinguished important groups or sub-classes among them. As I said in Section ii of this chapter, a slave who was permitted by his master to possess slaves of his own, *vicarii*, was also *pro tanto* a member of the propertied class, although of course his foothold within that class was very precarious and dependent upon his master's goodwill.

Now it may be that some people today will feel that to restrict Marx's notion of class struggle (as he occasionally did himself) to circumstances in which an *overt struggle on the political plane* can be shown to exist (as it cannot between masters and slaves in Classical antiquity) makes better sense and should be generally adopted. I am now<sup>17</sup> far from sharing this view. To me, the essence of the relationship of classes, in a class society founded on the existence of private property in the means of production, is the economic exploitation which is the very *raison d'être* of the whole class system; and, as I have insisted all along, Marx himself normally takes this for granted. If we adopt the view I am combating, we are obliged to take the expression 'the class struggle' in the very limited sense of 'effective and open class struggle on the political plane, involving actual class consciousness on both sides'. Certainly, the slaves of the Greeks had no means of political expression: they were ethnically very heterogeneous, and they could often not even communicate with each other except in their master's language; they could not hope to carry on an *open political* struggle against their masters,



therefore, except on very rare occasions when, as in Sicily in the late second century B.C., the circumstances happened to favour mass uprisings (see III.iv below and its nn.8, 15). But if the division into economic classes is in its very nature the expression of the way in which above all exploitation is effected – by which, that is to say, the propertied classes live off the non-propertied – then there is to that extent an unceasing struggle between exploited and exploiting classes, and in antiquity between masters and slaves *above all*, even if only the masters could carry it on effectively: they would always be united, and be prepared to act, as Xenophon says in the *Hiero* (IV.3), ‘as unpaid bodyguards of each other against their slaves’ (cf. Plato, *Rep.* IX.578d-9a, quoted in III.iv below). And in my picture the masters conduct a permanent struggle, if sometimes an almost effortless one, in the very act of holding down their slaves. But in a sense even slaves who are kept in irons and driven with a whip can conduct some kind of passive resistance, if only by quiet sabotage and breaking a tool or two.<sup>18</sup> I also regard as an important form of class struggle the propaganda, whether sincere or tongue-in-cheek, which masters (or any exploiting class) may use to persuade slaves (or any exploited class) to accept their position without protest, even perhaps as being ‘in their own best interests’: the doctrine of ‘natural slavery’ is only the most extreme example of this (see VII.ii-iii below). There is even evidence of counter-propaganda by the slaves, replying to their masters. But the class struggle in the Greek world on the ideological plane is a particularly fascinating subject which I must reserve for extended treatment in VII below.

I wish now to draw attention to a minor methodological and conceptual error which sometimes occurs in the writings of Marx and Engels, in particular in two early works: *The Communist Manifesto*, of 1847-8, and the *German Ideology*,<sup>19</sup> written in 1845-6 but then (as Marx put it in 1859, in the short *Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*) ‘abandoned to the gnawing criticism of the mice’, as something through which he and Engels had achieved their ‘main purpose: self-clarification’ (MESW 183). The error in question may sound quite trivial and is certainly a mere slip; but if it is not noticed and corrected it may have serious methodological consequences. In both works Marx and Engels, speaking at the beginning of *The Communist Manifesto* of class struggle (MECW VI.482), and in the *German Ideology* (MECW V.432) of the ‘opposition’ (*Gegensatz*) within which society has hitherto always developed, mention among their pairs of contestants ‘free man and slave’, ‘free men and slaves’;<sup>20</sup> and in the *German Ideology*, as I have already stated, there is also mention of ‘completely developed class relations’ in the ancient city-state ‘between citizens and slaves’ (MECW V.33). In each case they should of course have spoken of ‘slaveowners and slaves’.<sup>21</sup> The contrast between slave and free, or slave and citizen, is of the highest importance as a distinction of status or ‘order’ (cf. Section v of this chapter), but it is not the right contrast to draw when one is thinking (as Marx and Engels were here) in terms of economic class: in that sense the correct opposition is between slave and slaveowner, for large numbers of free men in antiquity owned no slaves. There is no harm, of course, in speaking of class conflicts between ‘the propertied class’ and the slaves, because all Greeks or Romans who owned any substantial amount of property would own slaves.

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In support of taking class as above all the collective social expression of the fact of exploitation, rather than (at the opposite extreme) self-conscious and united political activity, I wish to adduce a contemporary phenomenon of very great interest: the large class of temporary migrant (or immigrant) workers who come to the countries of north-west Europe from, mainly, the lands bordering on the Mediterranean, and whose number in the years from about 1957 to 1972 was of the order of 9 million, a figure which by now has been greatly exceeded. This extraordinary movement, which has been described as ‘colonisation in reverse’, has recently been the subject of a detailed and excellent study, *Immigrant Workers and Class Structure in Western Europe* (1973),<sup>22</sup> by Stephen Castles and Godula Kosack, who point out (p.409) that it ‘involves the transfer of a valuable economic resource – human labour – from the poor to the rich countries’. Immigrant workers normally occupy the lowest posts in the hierarchy of labour, which indigenous workers prefer to avoid and often can hardly be induced to undertake at all, and which carry the lowest rates of pay. Most of these migrants have no political rights and do not belong to trades unions, and they are normally unable to take any action in defence of their position. Even though industrial action may occasionally be open to them in principle, there is hardly any chance that they will indulge in it and thus place their whole position in jeopardy and risk arousing the unreasoning hostility of the natives (see Castles and Kosack, *op. cit.* 152 ff., 478-80). Immigrants are therefore more exposed to ruthless exploitation than the native workers, and they are often subjected to a degree of ‘discipline’ which the indigenous worker would not tolerate. This can have not merely economic but also social and political effects, extending far outside the circle of the immigrants themselves. As Castles and Kosack put it, ‘Immigration helps to give large sections of the indigenous working class the consciousness of a “labour aristocracy” which supports or acquiesces in the exploitation of another section of the working class. In this way immigration helps to stabilise the capitalist order, not only economically, but also politically’ (*op. cit.* 481, cf. 426-7) – a fact which has of course been noted with great approval by members of the ruling class in host countries. A similar movement of temporary immigrant workers into South Africa from the much poorer countries on or near her borders has also been taking place for some time, and this too has made the white South African working class into a ‘labour aristocracy’, organised in trades unions from which the black immigrants are rigorously excluded.<sup>23</sup>

We see here, then, another illustration of the principle we observed earlier: although the immigrant worker (like the ancient slave) is, almost by definition, precluded from playing any sort of political role, and in practice has little or no chance of taking even industrial action in his own defence, the very existence of a class of immigrant workers has important consequences not only in the economic sphere but also socially and politically. A definition of ‘class struggle’ in purely political terms, which can take account neither of the Greek slave nor of the immigrant worker, is therefore not even adequate on the political level, even though the immigrant or the slave himself cannot operate directly at that level. The only definition that does make sense, here as elsewhere, is one that proceeds from the fact of exploitation, and takes account of its nature and intensity.

This brings out a question of principle on which I feel obliged to register a



small disagreement with Castles and Kosack. In their opinion:

Immigrant workers cannot be regarded as a distinct class . . . All workers, whether immigrant or indigenous, manual or non-manual, possess the basic characteristics of a proletariat: they do not own or control the means of production, they work under the directions of others and in the interests of others, and they have no control over the product of their work . . . Immigrant workers and indigenous workers together form the working class in contemporary Western Europe, but it is a divided class . . . We may therefore speak of two strata within the working class [with the indigenous workers forming the upper and the immigrants the lower stratum] (op. cit. 461-82, at 476-7).

The choice in this particular case between, on the one hand, two classes, and on the other, a single 'divided class' or one possessing a 'higher stratum' and a 'lower stratum', is not in itself very important. There is a significant sense in which immigrant workers and indigenous workers do form a single 'working class'. However, the principle adopted by Castles and Kosack of disregarding, as criteria of class, everything except relationship to the means of production is too rigid. It would certainly involve our treating the slaves of the Greek world, absurdly, as belonging to the same class as free hired workers and even many poor free artisans and landless peasants.<sup>21</sup> Yet, as I have shown above, Marx and Engels certainly wrote of slaves in antiquity as a class, even if on occasion they could contrast them, unsuitably, with 'free men' rather than 'slaveowners' (see above). Although I generally treat ancient slaves as a separate class, I realise that for some purposes they may have to be considered as very close to hired labourers and other poor free workers and as forming with them a single class (or group of classes) of 'the exploited'. In my definition of class (in Section ii of this chapter) I recognise that legal (constitutional) position, *Rechtsstellung*, is 'one of the factors that may help to determine class', because it is likely to affect the type and intensity of exploitation involved. The modern immigrant worker is not subject to anything like such extreme constraints as the ancient slave, and whether we should regard him as belonging to a different class from the indigenous worker depends on the nature and purpose of the investigation we are conducting. Marx certainly regarded Irish immigrants as 'a very important section of the working class in England' in his day: see his letter to L. Kugelman of 29 November 1869 (MESC 276-8, at 277), and compare his letter to S. Meyer and A. Vogt of 9 April 1870 (MESC 284-8), quoted by Castles and Kosack, op. cit. 461.

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Anyone who finds the term 'class struggle' objectionable when used in the sometimes quite unpolitical sense which for me is primary can try to find an alternative. All I ask is that the situation I have depicted in my definition of class – that is to say (to put it crudely), *exploitation by the propertied class of the non-propertied* – be accepted both as the most fruitful way of employing the expression 'class', at any rate in relation to the ancient world, and as the primary way in which Marx and Engels conceived class when they were not thinking mainly of the confrontation between the classes of mid-nineteenth-century capitalist society. That society had characteristics very different from those of the ancient world, above all in the fact that the lowest class, the proletariat, was already beginning to acquire in some of the advanced countries (notably England)

a sense of unity and class interest which virtually never existed at all among the slaves of antiquity.

In short, I am fully prepared to be criticised for what some may think a clumsy and even potentially misleading use of the term 'class struggle', provided it is always recognised that class is a relationship involving above all things exploitation, and that in every class society it is indeed class – and not social status or political position or membership of an 'order' – which is in the long run the fundamental element.

(iv)

### Aristotle's sociology of Greek politics

I am very far from being one of those historians who, by instinct or of set purpose, insist upon defining the society they are studying in the terms adopted by its own dominant class – as when Roland Mousnier, in a remarkably compact and well-written little book, *Les hiérarchies sociales de 1450 à nos jours* (Paris, 1969), wishes to see pre-revolutionary France as a 'société d'ordres', divided not into classes (these he will admit only in the capitalist era) but into 'orders' or 'estates', grades in society based not upon any role in the productive process but ultimately upon social function, and instituted in legally recognised categories. However, it happens that I am fortunate in being able to find in Greek thought an analysis of the society of the Greek polis which is quite remarkably like the one I would wish to apply in any event.

It is natural to begin with Aristotle, who was in a class by himself among the political theorists and sociologists of antiquity: he studied the politics and sociology of the Greek city more closely than anyone else; he thought more profoundly about these subjects and he wrote more about them than anyone. There could be no greater mistake than to suppose that because Aristotle was primarily a philosopher he was, like most modern philosophers, either incapable of, or uninterested in, extensive and accurate empirical investigation. Not only was he one of the greatest natural scientists of all time, especially in zoology (a field in which he had no rival in antiquity); he was also a social and political scientist of the very first rank. In addition to that masterpiece, the *Politics*,<sup>1</sup> he is also credited with having produced – doubtless with the aid of pupils – no less than 158 *Politeiai*, monographs on city constitutions, and several other works in the field of politics, sociology and history (see my AHP).<sup>2</sup> including a list of victors in the Pythian Games, compiled in collaboration with his young relative Callisthenes, for which they must have done research in the archives at Delphi. This is the earliest known archival research which is certain, although there is a late tradition that Hippias the 'sophist', of Elis, compiled an Olympic victor list (about 400 B.C.), which is generally accepted (as by Jacoby) but seems to me unreliable in the extreme: our only authority for its existence is a statement by Plutarch (*Numa* 1.6), more disparaging than most people realise, mentioning an *Olympionikōn anagraphe* 'which they say Hippias published here, having no source that obliges us to trust it'.<sup>3</sup> No fragments survive. The partially preserved Delphic inscription of the 320s B.C. which records the completion of the Pythian victor list by Aristotle and Callisthenes is a sufficient refutation of the view that Aristotle, as a philosopher, could not have been



greatly concerned about brute facts in the sphere of the social sciences and would be likely to distort or invent them to suit his preconceived philosophical views. (The inscription from Delphi is Tod, *SGHI* II. 187 = *SIG*<sup>3</sup> 275; cf. my AHP 57 n. 44.) There is good reason to think that Aristotle was at least the part-author of the works with which he was credited in antiquity in the field of what we call history, sociology, law and politics, and that he planned, and worked upon during his lifetime with his pupil Theophrastus, a vast treatise on *Laws* (the *Nomoi*), which was eventually published by Theophrastus in no fewer than 24 Books (roughly three times the size of the *Politics*), and of which a few fragments survive.<sup>4</sup> Aristotle's competence as an authority on the political life of the *polis* cannot be doubted: in this field, as I have indicated, he towers above everyone else in antiquity. He receives unqualified and justified eulogy from Marx, as 'a giant thinker', 'the greatest thinker of antiquity', 'the acme of ancient philosophy' (see I.iv above).

My concentration on Aristotle as the great figure in ancient social and political thought and my relative neglect of Plato will surprise only those who know little or nothing of the source material for fourth-century Greek history and have acquired such knowledge as they possess from modern books – nearly always very deferential to Plato. Aristotle, in the *Politics*, usually keeps very close to actual historical processes, whereas Plato throughout his works is largely unconcerned with historical reality, with 'what happened in history', except for certain matters which happened to catch his attention, inward-looking as it generally was. Certainly he had one or two powerful insights: in a recent article, Fuks (PSQ) has drawn attention to his obsessive conviction – justified, as I think – that the tense political atmosphere and acute civil strife of his day were the direct consequence of increasing contrasts between wealth and poverty. In particular Plato realised that an oligarchy – in the sense of a constitution resting on a property qualification, in which the wealthy rule and the poor are excluded from government (*Rep.* VIII.550cd) – will actually be two cities, one of the poor and the other of the rich, 'always plotting against each other' (551d): it will be characterised by extremes of wealth and poverty (552b), with nearly all those outside the ruling circle becoming paupers (*ptōchoi*, 552d). We may recall the picture of England in 1845 drawn by Benjamin Disraeli in his novel significantly entitled *Sybil, or The Two Nations*. Plato therefore gave much attention to the problems of property and its ownership and use; but his solutions were ill-conceived and misdirected. Above all, in the vitally important field of production he had nothing of the slightest value to suggest: in the *Republic* in particular he concentrated on consumption, and his so-called 'communism' was confined to his small ruling class of 'Guardians' (see Fuks, PSQ, esp. 76–7). But he was not willing, as Aristotle was, to study carefully a whole series of concrete situations, which might have upset some of his preconceived notions. He preferred to develop, as a philosopher, what his numerous admirers often call 'the logic of the ideas' – a 'logic' which, if it starts out from a faulty empirical base, as it often does, is only the more certain to reach faulty conclusions, the more rigorous it is. To take just one prominent example – Plato's account of democracy and 'the democratic man' in *Republic* VIII.555b–569c is a grotesque caricature of at any rate the one fourth-century democracy we know most about: that of Athens, which in Plato's day bore little resemblance to his

unpleasant portrait of democracy, and moreover was particularly stable and showed nothing of the tendency to transform itself into tyranny which Plato represents as a typical feature of democracy (562a ff.). Yet Plato's fancy picture of the transformation of democracy into tyranny has often been treated as if it were a revelation of the innate characteristics of democracy – as of course it was intended to be. Cicero, giving in *De republica* I.65 (*fin.*) to 68 almost a paraphrased summary of Plato, *Rep.* 562a–4a, evidently regarded Plato's account as a description of what is likely to happen in actual practice. Yet Cicero, in the same work, can make one of his characters, Laelius, describe Plato's imaginary ideal state as 'remarkable indeed, no doubt, but irreconcilable with human life and customs' (*praeclaram quidem fortasse, sed a vita hominum abhorrentem et a moribus*, II.21). Aristotle's criticisms of the *Republic* (in *Pol.* II.1, 1261<sup>a</sup>4 ff.) are far from showing him at his best, but at least he did grasp one vital fact: that even Plato's ruling 'Guardian' class (*phylakes*) could not be happy. 'And if the Guardians are not happy, who else can be?', he asks. 'Certainly not the *technitai* and the mass of the *hannausoi*' (*Pol.* II.5, 1264<sup>b</sup>15–24). As for the city pictured in Plato's *Laws*, described as his 'second-best State' (*Laws* V.739b–e; VII.807b), it is both so grimly repressive and so unworkable that even Plato's admirers usually prefer to let it drop out of sight.<sup>4a</sup>

The wildly exaggerated respect which has been paid down the ages to Plato's political thought is partly due to his remarkable literary genius and to the anti-democratic instincts of the majority of scholars. Plato was anti-democratic in the highest degree. It would not be fair to call him typically 'oligarchic' in the usual Greek sense, as I shall define it later in this section: he did not want the rich as such to rule. (Plato of course knew well that the standard form of Greek oligarchy was the rule of a propertied class: see e.g. *Rep.* VIII.550cd, 551ab,d, 553a; *Polit.* 301a.) But both Plato's 'best' and his 'second-best' States were iron-bound oligarchies, designed to prevent change or development of any kind, and permanently excluding from political rights every single one of those who actually worked for their living. Plato's arrogant contempt for all manual workers is nicely displayed in the passage from the *Republic* (VI.495c–6a) about the 'bald-headed little tinker', which I have given in VII.i below.

\* \* \* \* \*

Like so many other Greeks, Aristotle regarded a man's economic position as the decisive factor in influencing his behaviour in politics, as in other fields. He never feels the need to argue in favour of this position, which he could simply take for granted, because it was already universally accepted. For him even *eugeneia*, noble birth, involved inherited wealth as an essential element (see my *OPW* 373).<sup>5</sup> At times he employs what some modern sociologists (for instance Ossowski, *CSSC* 39–40 etc.) have called a 'trichotomous' scheme of division, into rich, poor and men of moderate wealth, *hoi mesoi*, an expression which it is better not to translate 'middle class' (the usual rendering), if only because of the peculiar modern connotation of that term. In an important passage in the *Politics* (IV.11, 1295<sup>b</sup>1–96<sup>b</sup>2) he begins by saying that in every *polis* – he is speaking only of the citizen population – there are three parts (*merē*): the rich (*euporoi*), the poor (*aporoi*, who need not be completely propertyless: see III.8, 1279<sup>b</sup>19), and the *mesoi*; and he goes on to say that neither of the two extreme classes is willing to



listen to reason and persuasion; they feel either contempt or envy for each other; they are likely either to be plotted against because of their great possessions or to covet the possessions of others and plot against them; they are either too unwilling to obey or too abject and mean-spirited to know how to command; and the result is a city consisting not of free men but as it were of masters and slaves, in which there occur civil dissensions and armed conflicts (*staseis . . . kai machai*) between rich and poor, and either the few rich set up a pure oligarchy (an *oligarchia akratos*) or the many poor set up an extreme democracy (a *dēmos eschatos*). The *mesoi*, he thinks, suffer from none of the disadvantages mentioned; and the greater the proportion of *mesoi*, the better governed the city is likely to be. (Did Aristotle perhaps have Athens particularly in mind here? It surely had more *mesoi* than most Greek states.) Shortly afterwards Aristotle returns to the same theme, insisting that it is the arbitrator (*diatētēs*) who inspires the greatest confidence everywhere, and that the *mesos* is an arbitrator between the other two groups, who are again designated as rich and poor: neither of these two groups, he says, will ever willingly endure political subjection (*douleuein*) to the other, and they would not even consent to 'rule turn and turn about' (*en merei archein*), so deep is their distrust of one another (IV.12, 1296<sup>b</sup>34-97<sup>a</sup>7).

On the other hand, Aristotle also (and more often) resorts to a simpler 'dichotomic' model – which, by the way, is regularly adopted by Plato.<sup>6</sup> In Aristotle's dichotomy (as in Plato's and everyone else's) the citizens are divided into rich and poor, or into the propertied class (*hoi tas ousias echontes*) and those who have no property, or virtually none (*hoi aporoi*). Even in the passage from *Politics* IV which I summarised above Aristotle admits that the number of *mesoi* in most cities is small, and he regards outright oligarchy or democracy as only too likely to occur.<sup>7</sup> In general, it would be true to say that in Aristotle, as in other Greek writers (especially the historians), the nearer a political situation comes to a crisis, the more likely we are to be presented with just two sides: whatever the terminology used (and the Greek political vocabulary was exceptionally rich)<sup>8</sup> we shall usually be justified in translating whatever expressions we find by 'the upper classes' and 'the lower classes', meaning essentially the propertied and the non-propertied.

One could cite quite a large number of passages in which Aristotle takes it for granted – quite correctly – that the propertied class would set themselves up as an oligarchy whenever they were able to do so, whereas the poor would institute democracy (see my *OPW* 35, with the notes). Technically, of course, oligarchy (*oligarchia*) should be the rule of the Few (the *oligoi*), democracy the rule of the Demos, a term which sometimes means the whole people, sometimes specifically the lower classes, the poor (see my *OPW* 35 ff., esp. 41-2). But in one remarkable passage (*Pol.* III.8, 1279<sup>b</sup>16 ff., esp. 1279<sup>b</sup>34-80<sup>a</sup>3) Aristotle brushes aside the mere difference of number, which he says is purely accidental and due to the fact that the rich happen to be few and the poor many: he insists that the real ground of the difference between democracy and oligarchy is poverty and wealth (*penia kai ploutos*), and he goes on to explain that he would continue to speak in terms of 'oligarchy' and 'democracy' in the same way even if the rich were many and the poor few! (Cf. IV.4, 1290<sup>a</sup>40-<sup>b</sup>3, 17-20.)<sup>9</sup> When the propertied class can rule, they do, and that is oligarchy. Democracy is government by the majority, and the majority are in fact poor: democracy is therefore

government by the poor, and the poor could be expected to desire democracy. (All this illustrates Aristotle's firm belief, to which I have already drawn attention, that a man's political behaviour will normally depend upon his economic position.)

Aristotle also takes it for granted – as did Greek thinkers generally, including Plato – that the class which achieves power, whether it be the rich or the poor, will rule with a view to its own advantage (cf. *Pol.* III.7, 1279<sup>b</sup>6-10). He remarks that those who have a greater share of wealth than others tend to conceive themselves as absolutely superior (V.1, 1301<sup>a</sup>31-3); and he regards it as a foregone conclusion that those who have very great possessions will think it actually unjust (*ou dikaion*) for men having no property to be put in a position of political equality with property-owners (V.12, 1316<sup>b</sup>1-3).<sup>10</sup> Indeed, he says, men of oligarchical inclinations define justice itself in terms of 'what is decided by [those possessing] a preponderant amount of property' (VI.3, 1318<sup>a</sup>18-20). So completely did Aristotle see oligarchy and democracy as rule by the rich (over the poor) and rule by the poor (over the rich) respectively that in one striking passage he remarks that neither oligarchy nor democracy could continue without the existence of both rich and poor, and that if equality of property (*homalotēs tēs ousias*) were introduced the constitution would have to be something different from either (V.9, 1309<sup>b</sup>38-10<sup>a</sup>2). It is just after this, incidentally, that he records the interesting fact that 'in some States' (he is apparently referring to oligarchies) of his day the oligarchically-minded (*hoi oligarchikoi*) 'take the oath, "I will bear ill-will towards the common people [the *dēmos*], and I will plan against them all the evil I can"' (1310<sup>a</sup>8-12). Needless to say, Aristotle did not approve of such behaviour. Elsewhere in the *Politics* he remarks, 'Even when the poor have no access to honours they are willing to remain quiet provided no one treats them arrogantly or robs them of their property' (IV.13, 1297<sup>b</sup>6-8; cf. V.8, 1308<sup>b</sup>34-9<sup>a</sup>9; VI.4, 1318<sup>b</sup>11-24). But he goes on at once to qualify this: 'It does not come about easily, however, for those who have political power are not always gracious' (1297<sup>b</sup>8-10; cf. 1308<sup>a</sup>3 ff., esp. 9-10). He realised that if the poor are to be kept contented, magistrates, especially in oligarchies, must not be allowed to profit unduly from office (V.8 and VI.4, quoted above). Yet he could also admit that *all* constitutions which he was prepared to describe as 'aristocratic' are so oligarchical that the leading men are unduly oppressive (*mallon pleonektousin hoi gnōrimoi*: V.7, 1307<sup>a</sup>34-5).

The categories employed by Aristotle were already very well established. Earlier in the fourth century Plato, Xenophon, the Oxyrhynchus historian and others had taken them for granted, and in the fifth century we find them not only in Thucydides, Herodotus and others (notably the writer of the Pseudo-Xenophontic *Athēnaion Politeia*, often referred to as 'the Old Oligarch'),<sup>11</sup> but even in poetry. I am thinking in particular of the passage in the *Supplies* of Euripides (lines 238-45; cf. my *OPW* 356 and n.1), where Theseus is made to say that there are three kinds of citizen: the greedy and useless rich (the *olbioi*); the covetous poor, easily led astray by scurvy demagogues (*ponēroi prostatai*); and 'those in the middle' (*hoi en mesōi*), who can be the salvation of the city – Aristotle's *mesoi*, of course. Here, as in Aristotle and elsewhere, these people are quite clearly men of moderate opinions or behaviour, although both Euripides and Aristotle evidently expected that moderate opinions and behaviour would be



the natural consequence of the possession of a moderate amount of property – a delightfully realistic view, which may however seem distressingly Marxist to those who today speak of ‘moderates’ when they mean right-wingers. (I shall not go back behind the fifth century in this brief review of Greek political terminology: I propose to say something about the seventh and sixth centuries later, in V.i below.)

It is a fact of the utmost significance that the earliest known example – and the only certain example before Alexander the Great – of divine cult being paid to a living man by a Greek city was the direct result of bitter class struggle on the political plane. The cult in question was instituted in honour of the Spartan commander Lysander by the narrow oligarchy (it is referred to as a ‘decarchy’, or rule of ten men) which he had installed in power at Samos in 404 B.C., after destroying the Samian democracy and ‘liberating’ the island from its alliance with Athens, to which the democracy had clung firmly even after the defeat of Athens in the Peloponnesian war had become certain, with Lysander’s victory over the Athenian fleet at Aegospotami in the autumn of 405. (The existence of the cult of Lysander at Samos, sometimes doubted, has become certain since the discovery of an inscription referring to the festival of the Lysandreia: see my *OPW* 64 and n.5.)

I have just been showing that Aristotle’s analysis of political activity in the Greek city started from the empirically demonstrable premise, which he shared not only with other Greek thinkers but also with Marx, that the main determining factor in the political behaviour of most individuals is economic class – as of course it still is today.<sup>12</sup> (Naturally Aristotle realised, as Marx did, that there will be exceptions to this rule, but he knew that they were not numerous enough to deprive it of its value as a generalisation.) I shall presently show that Aristotle also, in an even more interesting way, took the same fundamental approach as Marx towards the analysis of a citizen body; but before I do this I should like to demonstrate the value of the kind of analysis I have just been giving of Greek political and sociological thinking (utilising the same basic categories as Aristotle – and Marx) by showing how well it explains the origin of the so-called ‘theory of the mixed constitution’. This theory played an important part in Greek (and Roman) political thought: the ‘mixed constitution’, in the writings of Polybius, Cicero and others, became a kind of Weberian ‘ideal type’;<sup>13</sup> but by then the theory had developed into something rather different from what it had been in its initial phase, in the late fifth century and the fourth. By far the earliest surviving expression of the notion that the mixed constitution is a desirable one is in a much-discussed passage in Thucydides (VIII.97.2), praising the so-called ‘constitution of the Five Thousand’ at Athens in 411–410 B.C. as just such a mixture.<sup>14</sup> The mixed constitution was evidently admired by Plato,<sup>15</sup> but the best theoretical justification of it is to be found in Book IV of Aristotle’s *Politics*.<sup>16</sup>

In a striking passage earlier in his great work, Aristotle recognises that if the lower classes (the *dēmos*) are totally deprived of political rights and are not even allowed to have the necessary minimum power of electing the magistrates and calling them to account, they will be in the position of ‘a slave and an enemy’ (II.12, 1274<sup>a</sup>15–18; cf. III.11, 1281<sup>b</sup>28–30). Indeed, in a particularly realistic chapter (no.11) in Book III Aristotle accepts perhaps more

explicitly than anywhere else in his surviving works the distinguishing characteristic of Greek democracy: the necessity for the whole citizen body to be sovereign in the deliberative, legislative and judicial spheres (1282<sup>a</sup>29 ff., esp. 34–b1), including of course the two activities already mentioned to which Aristotle again attaches the greatest importance, namely electing the magistrates and calling them to account (*hairesis* and *euthyna*, 1282<sup>a</sup>26–7). The reasoning that lies behind this conclusion is based on the recognition that while each individual may be a worse judge than the experts (*hoi eidotes*, ‘those who know’), the judgment of all collectively is better, or anyway no worse (1282<sup>a</sup>16–17; cf. III.15, 1286<sup>a</sup>26–35, esp. 30–3). However, Aristotle also felt instinctively that if the poor are all allowed to vote in the Assembly they will be able to swamp it and outvote the propertied class; and indeed – blandly ignoring what actually did happen at Athens, where property rights were very carefully preserved – he says that if the majority are allowed to do exactly as they like, they will confiscate the property of the rich (*Pol.* VI.3, 1318<sup>a</sup>24–6; cf. III.10, 1281<sup>a</sup>14–19). Democracy, in Aristotle’s view, can only too easily become (if I may be forgiven a momentary lapse into highly anachronistic and inappropriate terminology) the dictatorship of the proletariat! So it is necessary to give the propertied class extra weight, so to speak, in such a way as to make up for their built-in numerical inferiority and bring them to something like a balance with the non-propertied. Aristotle has various suggestions as to how this might be done: for example, you might decide to fine the rich for non-attendance in the courts at the same time as you pay a certain number of the poor for attending (*Pol.* IV.9, 1294<sup>a</sup>37–41; 13, 1297<sup>a</sup>36–40; cf. 14, 1298<sup>b</sup>23–6).

This reveals clearly the climate of thought which originally produced the theory of the mixed constitution: you start by assuming, as Aristotle always does, that the propertied and the non-propertied are naturally opposed classes whose interests are very hard to reconcile, and you then manipulate the constitution in such a way as to compensate for the numerical inferiority of the upper class and produce a balance between rich and poor, which can be expected to have the important virtue of stability, and which you can hold out as a judicious mixture of oligarchy (or aristocracy) and democracy – with kingship thrown in for good measure if you happen to have important magistrates like the kings of Sparta or the Roman consuls. After Aristotle the theory of the mixed constitution changed its character: as it became more and more unnecessary to take serious account of democracy (in the full sense) as a possible political form, so interest in the mixed constitution came to centre mainly in formal constitutional elements and the relative powers of Assembly, Council (or Senate) and magistrates. In Cicero’s eyes it was the best way of reconciling the masses to aristocratic rule and thus ensuring political stability and the security of property-ownership.<sup>17</sup> Discussion has lately concentrated on the later phase; what I have been trying to do is to show how the theory first emerged and the place it occupied in the thought of Aristotle. I would describe it as being in its origin a means of ensuring a balance in the political class struggle.

There are traces at many points in Aristotle’s work of his belief that the conflict of interests between propertied and non-propertied is fundamental and inescapable, and that even if a fully ‘mixed’ constitution cannot be achieved, attempts ought at least to be made to reconcile that conflict of interests as far as



possible both by constitutional rules and by sensible behaviour in practice. Perhaps the most useful series of passages to quote here is *Politics* V.8 (esp. 1308<sup>a</sup>3-11, 1308<sup>b</sup>25-31, 1308<sup>b</sup>34-9<sup>a</sup>9, 1309<sup>a</sup>14-32).

It would be easy to sneer at Aristotle's recommendations for the reconciliation of the irreconcilable – 'mixed constitution' and all. This however would be wrong, for in the class society for which Aristotle was prescribing the conflicts were indeed inescapable, and no radical transformation of society for the better was then conceivable. In the later Middle Ages the ending of feudal restrictions and the full transition to capitalism offered real hope of betterment for all but a few; and in our own time the prolonged death-throes of capitalism encourage us to look forward to a fully socialist society. For Aristotle and his contemporaries there were no prospects of fundamental change that could offer any expectation of a better life for even a citizen of a *polis*, except at the expense of others. The greatness of Aristotle as a political and social thinker is visible to us not only in his recognition (which even Plato shared: see above) of the structural defects of existing Greek *poleis*, automatically creating an opposition between propertied and non-propertied, but also in his generally practicable and often very acute ideas for palliating as far as possible the evil consequences of those defects – ideas which at least compare very favourably with the utterly impracticable fantasies of Plato.

Aristotle was a great advocate of the sovereignty of law (*nomos*), a subject to which he returns again and again. Yet in one of the many passages in which he honestly faces difficulties he admits that law itself can be 'either oligarchic or democratic' (*Pol.* III.10, 1281<sup>a</sup>34-9, at 37); and at the end of the next chapter he explains that the nature of law depends upon the type of constitution (*politeia*) within which it functions (11, 1282<sup>b</sup>6-11). Also, as Jones pointed out some years ago and Hansen has recently demonstrated in detail,<sup>18</sup> Aristotle is demonstrably unfair to what he is pleased to call 'extreme democracy' – for when many of us would prefer to speak of 'radical democracy' or 'full democracy', Aristotle uses the expressions *eschatē dēmokratia* or *teleutaia dēmokratia*.<sup>19</sup> Over and over again Aristotle treats this form of democracy as one in which there is characteristically and habitually an overriding of law (or the laws) by decrees (*psēphismata*)<sup>20</sup> passed by the *dēmos* or *plēthos* in Assembly,<sup>21</sup> and in one case he speaks specifically of the *plēthos* of the *aporoι*, the mass of the propertyless (*Pol.* IV.6, 1293<sup>a</sup>9-10), a notion which is implicit in all these passages. Aristotle must have regarded the Athenian constitution, at any rate in the fourth century,<sup>22</sup> as a form of 'extreme democracy', yet his treatment of that kind of constitution, even if it applied to some other Greek democracies, was certainly not true of the Athenian form (see V.ii below, *ad init.*, § E, and its n.12). Nor, I may say, can we accept in relation to Athens, where property rights were carefully preserved, Aristotle's assumption that it was characteristic of Greek democracies to despoil the rich of their property (see *Pol.* III.10, 1281<sup>a</sup>14-24; and VI.3, 1318<sup>a</sup>24-6; cf. 5, 1320<sup>a</sup>4-14). All we can admit is that some condemnations in the courts, involving the confiscation of the property of wealthy men, were – in the eyes of some critics of the democracy – prompted at least partly by a desire to enrich the State at the expense of opulent individuals. How true Aristotle's strictures were of other Greek democracies we have no means of telling. He may well have generalised from a few notorious cases.

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I now come to what I regard as the most important and interesting part of this section: the fulfilment of my promise to demonstrate another way in which Aristotle's analysis of the citizen body of the Greek *polis* bears a remarkable resemblance to the method of approach adopted by Marx. Aristotle understood the reason why there are different types of constitution (different *politeiai*): it was because each citizen body was composed of different parts, *merē*, made up of households or families (*oikiai*) having widely differing characteristics,<sup>23</sup> and the constitution would express the relative strength of the different elements. As anyone who has studied the *Politics* carefully will know, Aristotle has various different ways of classifying the inhabitants of the Greek city-state. In Book IV, chapter 4, in particular, he tries to give a detailed list of the constituent parts of the citizen body, the *merē poleōs* (1290<sup>b</sup>38-1<sup>a</sup>8, 1291<sup>a</sup>33-<sup>b</sup>13). The categories with which he begins are the very ones I have specified (in Section ii of this chapter) as the defining characteristics of class in Marx's sense: Aristotle starts off with four groups defined according to their role in production – working farmers (*geōrgoi*), independent artisans (*to banauson*), traders (*to agoraion*, including both *emperoi*, who were essentially inter-state merchants, and *kapēloi*, petty local dealers),<sup>24</sup> and wage-labourers (*to thētikon*). Precisely the same four groups appear in Book VI (7, 1321<sup>a</sup>5-6), but there they are the constituent parts of the *plēthos*, the masses; and in IV.4 too it soon becomes evident that the *geōrgoi* are indeed (as I have called them above) *working* farmers, and not 'gentlemen farmers' who were really absentee landlords or employers of slave labour, for after Aristotle has mentioned his first four groups he wanders off into a mixture of economic, political and military categories, and as one of these (his no.7) he mentions the *euporoi*, the rich, the well-to-do property owners (1291<sup>a</sup>33-4). This is not one of Aristotle's clearest pieces of analysis: it contains a very long digression of nearly a page in length (1291<sup>a</sup>10-33), and some people think there must be a lacuna in the text. But eventually, after listing nine or ten categories, he realises that he has got himself into a hopeless mess, and he pulls together what he has been saying by remarking that there is just one distinction which will sort everyone out: no one can be both poor and rich. And so he returns once more to his fundamental distinction between rich and poor, propertied and propertyless: *euporoi* and *aporoι* (1291<sup>b</sup>7-8). He ends this section of his work by reiterating that there are two basic forms of constitution, corresponding to the distinction between *euporoi* and *aporoι*, namely oligarchy and democracy (1291<sup>b</sup>11-13). And in a later Book of the *Politics* he says emphatically that the *polis* is made up of 'two *merē*: rich and poor' (*plousioi kai penētes*, VI.3, 1318<sup>a</sup>30-1).

It is of the greatest interest, and entirely consistent with Aristotle's fundamental principles of sociological classification, that he was able to discriminate between different types of democracy according to the role played in production in each individual case by the majority of the lower classes (the *dēmos*), whether as farmers, artisans or wage-labourers, or as some mixture of these elements (see *Pol.* VI.1, 1317<sup>a</sup>24-9 and other passages),<sup>25</sup> whereas he can draw distinctions only on technical, constitutional grounds in three different passages discussing forms of oligarchy,<sup>26</sup> all of which would of course be ruled (as he takes for granted) by landowners (cf. III.iii below). Austin and Vidal-Naquet, while admitting that Aristotle is 'constantly reasoning in terms of class struggles',



maintain – apparently as a criticism of what they regard as Marxism – that ‘modern representations of class struggles’ are inappropriate here and that ‘one will search in vain for the place held by different groups in the relations of production as a criterion of ancient class struggles’ (ESHAG 22). This is literally correct – but why should anyone wish to apply categories that are highly relevant in capitalist society to a pre-capitalist world in which they are indeed inappropriate? Austin and Vidal-Naquet at this point seem to overlook the fact that the great majority of citizens in all Classical Greek States were involved in agricultural production in one way or another. Artisans in the fourth century were neither numerous nor important enough to exert any real influence as a class; foreign trade was probably often (as certainly at Athens) in the hands mainly of non-citizens;<sup>27</sup> and internal trade, although some citizens participated as well as many metics, gave little opportunity of acquiring wealth or political power. Aristotle realised that it was above all property-ownership or the lack of it which divided citizen bodies into what I am calling classes: he had no need to tell his Greek audience that property was overwhelmingly landed (cf. III.i–iii below).

The Aristotelian categories perhaps tend to be less refined than those of Marx. Except in one or two passages such as *Pol.* IV.4, quoted above, Aristotle is mainly thinking in quantitative terms, classifying citizens according to the amount of property they owned, whether large or small (or sometimes middling), whereas Marx’s analysis, except when he is speaking loosely, is usually more qualitative and concentrates more explicitly on relationship to the means and the labour of production. To put it in a different way: Marx perhaps concentrates more on the beginning and the structure of the process of production, Aristotle more on its results. But there is less difference than might appear. The very term Aristotle and others often use for the propertied class, *hoi tas ousias echontes*, employs a word, *ousia*, which is characteristically, though not exclusively, used of landed property (cf. the Latin word *locupletes*). As I have said, land and slaves were the principal means of production in antiquity, and land was always regarded as the ideal form of wealth. And Aristotle, in his analysis of the political community, certainly does come closer to Marx than any other ancient thinker I know: one occasion, as we have seen, he begins his classification of the constituent parts (the *merē*) of a citizen body by distinguishing the citizens according to the functions they perform in the productive process; he ends up with a basic dichotomy between propertied and propertyless; and he always takes a man’s economic position to be the main determinant of his political behaviour.

Now it is true that Aristotle may sometimes impose upon earlier events inappropriate categories drawn from the experience of his own day; but it is not legitimate to say (as some scholars have done) that whereas his picture of class differences and class struggle in Greek cities may be true of the fourth century, it need not be accepted for earlier periods. Fifth-century writers, as I have shown, give a very similar picture; and when we go back to contemporary sources in the Archaic Age, the poets Solon and Theognis in particular, we find some very clear examples of overt political class strife, although of course the classes were then rather different from what they had become by the fifth century (see V.i–ii below).

Aristotle does record the fact that some Greeks believed the fair regulation of property to be the most important of all matters, because they thought that all

*staseis* (civil disturbances) had their origin in questions of property (*Pol.* II. 7, 1266<sup>a</sup>37–9). Plato, of course, is the most obvious example (see Fuks, *PSQ*, es p. 49–51). And Aristotle goes on (1266<sup>a</sup>37–7<sup>b</sup>21) to discuss some of the views of Phaleas of Chalcedon (a thinker of unknown date, presumably of the late fifth or early fourth century), who, he says, was the first to propose that citizens should own equal amounts of property – in fact, as he explains later, of land (1267<sup>b</sup>9–21). Among various criticisms of Phaleas, Aristotle advances the view that it is no use confining a prescription for equal distribution of property to land; wealth, as he points out, can also consist of ‘slaves and cattle and money’, and one should either leave wealth entirely unregulated or else insist on complete equality or the fixing of a moderate maximum amount. This is the place to mention the remarkable opinion expressed by Diodorus (II.39.5), in connection with his idealised Indian society: ‘It is foolish to make laws on a basis of equality for all, but to make the distribution of property unequal.’ (Against gratuitous emendation of this passage, see my *OPW* 138 n.126.)

I fully realise that some people will feel irked by my unqualified and general acceptance of Marx’s concept of class struggle, with its emphasis on economic differentiation as the fundamental element, rather than social prestige or status or political power; they may still be disinclined to accept Marx’s picture as a generally valid description of human societies. But it should at least be clear beyond dispute by now that anyone who holds such opinions has no right to complain of my accepting Marx’s categories in the analysis of ancient Greek society. Far from being an anachronistic aberration confined to Marx and his followers, the concept of economic class as the basic factor in the differentiation of Greek society and the definition of its political divisions turns out to correspond remarkably well with the view taken by the Greeks themselves; and Aristotle, the great expert on the sociology and politics of the Greek city, always proceeds on the basis of a class analysis and takes it for granted that men will act, politically and otherwise, above all according to their economic position. The Marxist character (in the sense I have indicated) of Aristotle’s sociology has not escaped notice. The Aristotelian scholar J. L. Stocks remarked in 1936 of one statement in Book IV of the *Politics* that ‘it might be a quotation from the Communist Manifesto!’ (*CQ* 30.185). Stocks’s article, by the way, is entitled ‘*Scholē*’ (the Greek word for ‘leisure’), a concept of considerable importance in Aristotle’s thought which I find it more convenient to deal with in III.vi below, on hired labour. In recent years, in the Antipodes and across the Atlantic, some writers on the ancient world have contrived to forget Aristotle’s class analysis – which I dare say they regard as dangerously Marxist – or to pretend that it can be ignored, especially for the centuries earlier than the fourth. They have managed to persuade themselves that the conflicts in Greek society can be explained exclusively in terms of factions grouped around aristocratic families – factions which of course existed and could indeed cut across class lines, although to treat them as the basic elements in Greek politics and the rise of democracy is to fly in the face of the evidence, especially for Athens in the early sixth century onwards (see V.i and ii below). I shall waste no further time on these idiosyncratic notions; but I cannot resist referring to the delightful expression, ‘Aristotelian-Marxist explanations of Greek social and political development’, in a recent article by D. J. McCargar, who is prudently disinclined to reject such explanations



entirely, especially – for Athens – in the period beginning with Cleisthenes (508/7).<sup>28</sup>

I should perhaps just mention (since it has recently been reprinted) a very feeble attempt made by Marcus Wheeler, in an article published in 1951, to dissociate Aristotle's theory of *stasis*, or civil disturbance, from Marx's concept of class struggle.<sup>29</sup> The summary of Wheeler's arguments at the end of his article reveals his inability to make a deep enough analysis of either Aristotle or Marx.

There is positively no comfort in Aristotle, or in any other Greek thinker known to me, for those who (like Finley recently: see the next section of this chapter) have rejected class as the principal category for use in the analysis of ancient society and have preferred 'status'. It is hard to find even a good Greek equivalent for 'status'; but since Max Weber defined his 'status situation' (*ständische Lage*) as those aspects of a man's life that are determined by 'social estimation of honour' (*WuG*<sup>5</sup> II.534=ES II.932=FMW 186-7), I think we may accept *timē* ('honour', 'prestige') as the best Greek translation of 'status'. Now Aristotle of course knew very well – as did other Greek writers, including Thucydides (I.75.3; 76.2, etc.) – that *timē* was of great importance to many Greeks. For some, indeed, Aristotle realised that *timē* was a principal ingredient in happiness (*EN* I.4, 1095<sup>a</sup>14-26); and those he calls 'men of refinement and affairs' (*hoi charientes kai praktikoi*) – in contrast with the masses, who 'betray themselves as utterly slavish, in their preference for a life suitable for cattle' – could be expected to set great store by *timē*, which he himself considered to be 'virtually the goal of political life' (I.5, 1095<sup>b</sup>19-31), 'the greatest of external goods' (IV.3, 1123<sup>b</sup>15-21), 'a prize for excellence' (*aretē*, 1123<sup>b</sup>35), 'the aim of the majority' (VIII.8, 1159<sup>a</sup>16-17). But it is essential to observe that Aristotle's discussions of *timē* are kept almost entirely for his ethical works.<sup>30</sup> He would have had scant patience with those modern scholars who have wanted to use status as a yardstick in political and general classification – for that, Aristotle chose class, expressed in terms of property.

\* \* \* \* \*

I think I have now made at least a partly sufficient reply to statements such as that of Bottomore, quoted in I.iv above, that 'while the Marxian theory seems highly relevant and useful in analysing social and political conflicts in capitalist societies during a particular period, its utility and relevance elsewhere are much less clear'.

I have not thought it necessary to examine here any Greek 'political thought' – if we can dignify it with that name – of the Hellenistic and Roman periods.<sup>31</sup> I shall notice some of this disagreeable stuff later, when I have occasion to do so (see e.g. V.iii, VI.vi and VII.i below), but there is really no point in my dragging it in here. The whole concept of democracy – that great, fertile innovation of Classical Greek political thinking (as it was, notwithstanding its limitation to citizen bodies) – now became gradually degraded, as I shall show in V.iii below. *Dēmokratia* came to mean little more than some form of constitutional rule as opposed to tyranny, or else a measure of independence for a city, as opposed to outright control by a Hellenistic monarch; and there could no longer be any honest political thought on a realistic basis. Serious political activity, such as it was, became confined more and more completely to the propertied classes.

(v)

### Alternatives to class (status etc.)

We must now consider whether there is any more fruitful method of analysing human societies, according to different principles from those I have been advocating.

I must begin by putting myself at the opposite extreme from those I may call 'antiquarians', who renounce, explicitly or by implication, any wish to provide an organic picture of a historical society, illuminated by all the insight that we in modern times can bring to bear upon it, and deliberately confine themselves to reproducing as faithfully as possible some particular feature or aspect of that society, strictly in its own original terms. Such a person may often prove very useful to the historian, by drawing attention to particular sets of evidence and collecting a great deal of information which the historian can then transform into something significant. An outstanding example of this kind of antiquarian activity, which is yet presented in the opening sentence of its Preface as 'an essay in historical interpretation', is Fergus Millar's recent large book, *The Emperor in the Roman World* (1977), which begins by proclaiming in its Preface (xi-xii) a series of methodological principles to most of which the historian ought to feel hostile. Asserting that he has 'rigidly avoided reading sociological works on kingship or related topics, or studies of monarchic institutions in societies other than those of Greece and Rome', Millar goes on to say that 'to have come to the subject with an array of concepts derived from the study of other societies would merely have made even more unattainable the proper objective of a historian, to subordinate himself to the evidence and to the conceptual world of a society in the past' (my italics). And he congratulates himself on not having 'contaminated the presentation of the evidence from the Roman empire with conceptions drawn from wider sociological studies'. For Millar, 'the emperor "was" what the emperor did', an opinion given twice (xi and 6), the first time as a pendant to the 'conscious principle' he says he has followed, 'that any social system must be analysed primarily in terms of the specific patterns of action recorded of its members'. Another of his 'conscious principles' is that we must 'base our conceptions solely on . . . attitudes and expectations expressed in those ancient sources which provide our evidence'. And Millar believes himself to be describing 'certain essential elements', 'certain basic features of the working of the Roman empire', patterns which 'are of fundamental importance in understanding what the Roman empire was' (my italics in each case).

Perhaps the most serious of all the mistaken assumptions behind this 'programme' is that there is an objective entity, 'the evidence', to which the historian has merely to 'subordinate himself'. The volume of the surviving evidence for the Roman empire is enormous (inadequate as we may often find it for the solution of a particular problem); and all the historian can do is to select those parts of the evidence which he considers most relevant and significant. To pretend to oneself that all one has to do is simply to reproduce 'the' evidence is all too likely to result, and in Millar's case has resulted, in a mainly superficial picture, and one that explains little or nothing of importance. Moreover, to 'base our conceptions' as Millar advocates, solely on the attitudes and expectations expressed in those ancient sources which happen to survive is to deprive ourselves



of all the insights that come from penetrating beneath that very limited series of 'attitudes and expectations' and, where they reveal false comprehension and even self-deception, as they so often do, demonstrating the realities which they serve to conceal. (Compare what I have said in Sections i and iv of this chapter about 'beginning from' the categories and even the terminology in use among the ancient Greeks.) Again, before interrogating the evidence one needs to decide what are the most fruitful questions to ask. By altogether abjuring, not only all material which is not made explicit in the surviving sources, but also the comparative method and all those forms of analysis which have been developed in the study of sociology and of other historical societies, Millar has greatly impoverished himself and has failed even to become aware of many of the most fruitful questions. Particularly when our information from the ancient world is scanty or non-existent, as for example in regard to the peasantry (see I.iii above and IV.ii below), we may gain much insight from comparative studies. I would suggest that the passage I have summarised in IV.ii below from William Hinton's book, *Fanshen*, sheds light in a way no Greek or Roman source can equal upon the acceptance by poor peasants of the exploitation they suffer at the hands of a landlord class. However, it would be ungracious not to record that Millar's book is a notable piece of antiquarian research, an outstanding and invaluable repository of detailed and accurate information on those limited aspects of the Principate in which he happens to be interested. One would have had little to complain about had the Preface been omitted and the book given the more modest and more accurate title, 'Communication between the Roman Emperor and his Subjects'. If I have dwelt too long upon the book's limitations it is because they are all too characteristic of much contemporary writing about ancient history, though never made so explicit elsewhere.

I find myself not merely unwilling but unable to make use, for present purposes, of the wide range of theories of social stratification often grouped together (sometimes inappropriately) under the name of 'functionalism',<sup>1</sup> the main distinguishing characteristic of which is the attempt to explain social institutions above all in terms of their role in maintaining and reinforcing the social structure. Among the leading sociologists and anthropologists who can be placed at least to some extent in this group are Durkheim, Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown, Talcott Parsons, and R. K. Merton. I cannot see that the functionalist approach can help to explain any of the phenomena we shall be examining, least of all the process of social change which is very noticeable in parts of our period. A paper of great insight by Ralf Dahrendorf, 'In praise of Thrasymachus' (in his *ETS* 129-50), has traced functionalist theory as far back as the Socrates of Plato's *Republic* (I.336b-354c), who, in his debate with Thrasymachus, develops (as Dahrendorf puts it) an 'equilibrium theory' of social life, based upon an assumed consensus, in opposition to the 'constraint theory' of Thrasymachus, and who thus 'became the first functionalist' (*ETS* 150). As Dahrendorf says, 'An equilibrium approach cannot come to terms with certain substantive problems of change . . . Equilibrium theories lend themselves to explaining continuity alone, and even this only with respect to the most formal aspects of the political system' (*ETS* 143).

A methodology in the study of economic history which resembles that of the functionalists in anthropology has been emerging in recent years, partly under

the stimulus of economists, especially in the United States. (I am sure that those who are in principle hostile to Marxism will make great efforts to develop it still further.) I refer to those works which seek to minimise class conflicts in society and (if they notice them at all) treat such conflicts as less significant than those features which can be conceived, with or without distortion, as promoting social cohesion and 'rationality'. It is hard to choose examples among such works, for some of them may bear little resemblance to each other except their common 'functionalist' approach. I shall begin by singling out a recent book and two articles by D. C. North and R. P. Thomas,<sup>2</sup> enthusiastic practitioners of the 'New Economic History' (as its devotees like to call it), whose picture of the major economic developments that took place in the Middle Ages depends partly upon the assumption that 'Serfdom in Western Europe was essentially not an exploitative arrangement where lords "owned" labour as in North America, or as it developed in Eastern Europe', but 'essentially a contractual arrangement where labour services were exchanged for the public good of protection and justice'. I need say no more about these authors' fancy picture of serfdom as a voluntary contract, as it has been sufficiently demolished by Robert Brenner in a very able article, 'Agrarian class structure and economic development in pre-industrial Europe' in *Past & Present* 70 (1976) 30-75. This deals admirably with various types of 'economic model-building' which try to explain long-term economic developments in pre-industrial Europe primarily in terms either of demography (Postan, Bowden, Le Roy Ladurie, and North and Thomas) or of the growth of trade and the market (Pirenne and his followers), disregarding class relations and exploitation as primary factors.<sup>2a</sup> And Brenner's case against North and Thomas in particular can be strengthened. No one acquainted with the sources for Later Roman history would try to pretend that the serfdom of the Roman colonate, of the fourth and following centuries, was anything but thoroughly 'exploitative', for in the Later Roman world, over all, there was no such failure of State power as may have driven some mediaeval peasants to 'choose' subjection to a lord as a less unpleasant alternative than being at the mercy of all and sundry. We do find in the Later Empire a certain amount of resort to 'patronage', as something temporarily preferable to helpless independence in the face of fiscal oppression or barbarian incursions (see below), but in general it would be ridiculous to treat the colonate as anything but an instrument for reinforcing the subjection of the peasant to fiscal extortion and landlord control (see IV.iii and VI.vi below). And if the serfdom of the colonate is thus understood, the case for treating mediaeval serfdom as a voluntary contract benefiting peasant as well as lord is greatly weakened.

Another good example of the 'functionalist' tendencies I have just described is the very able little book by Sir John Hicks, *A Theory of Economic History*, published in 1969 and representing an expansion of lectures delivered from 1967 onwards. This is more directly relevant to subjects I deal with in this book, in that it purports to delineate the general features of what Hicks calls 'the lord-and-peasant system' (*TEH* 101 ff.), which would include not only the Late Roman colonate but a good deal of earlier rural life in the Greek world. Dr Pangloss would have been delighted with Hicks's account of this system. It was 'very ancient', he says, 'and very strong. It was strong because it met a real need. Lord and peasant were necessary to each other, and the land, the same land, was



necessary to both. The peasant was necessary to the lord, since it was from a share in the peasant's produce that he derived his support; and there was a corresponding way in which the lord was necessary to the peasant. Whatever the burden that was laid upon him, he got something in return; and what he got in return was vital. What he got was Protection' (TEH 102). This system is at once hypostatized and takes on a life of its own: Hicks speaks of it as if it could be itself a living force. 'It did not only persist; it recreated itself, under suitable conditions, when there had been a move away from it' (TEH 104). When it involves the cultivation of a lord's 'demesne land' by the forced labour of the peasants, Hicks can remark blandly that 'a lord-and-peasant system that moves in this direction would generally be regarded as moving towards a more complete condition of serfdom' (TEH 105). And when there is a shortage of labour, 'it is competition for labour that must be stopped. The labourer, or peasant-labourer, must be tied to the soil, or re-tied to the soil; in a more exact sense than before, he must be made a serf' (TEH 112). Hicks's characters, it will be observed – 'the lord', 'the peasant' and other such abstractions – are mere creatures of his system; and in all their acts they obediently conform to the types of behaviour expected of them by orthodox neo-classical economists, if not by historians. The absurdity of this idyllic picture of the 'lord-and-peasant system', like that of North and Thomas, which I have criticised above, is equally revealed, of course, by the serfdom of the Later Roman colonate, where 'protection' by the landowner was only rarely involved, and not at all at the inception of the colonate and for some time afterwards. It is a pity that Hicks was not acquainted with the source material for the Later Roman Empire, especially the passages quoted in III.iv and IV.iii below to demonstrate that in the eyes of the Roman ruling class the serf *colonus* was in a condition so close to slavery that only the vocabulary of that institution, technically inappropriate as it was, proved adequate to describe his subject condition. Perhaps it would be too cheap a sneer to say that we may be tempted to interpret the Protection which Hicks and others see the lord as extending to the peasant in a rather different sense from that intended by him: as a 'protection racket' indeed, in most cases – even if it could sometimes be taken seriously by peasants (for an example from fourteenth-century France, see IV.iv below, *ad fin.*). But at least we may be allowed to feel regret that Hicks could not have had these matters properly explained to him by the peasants of Long Bow village after their eyes had been opened at the meeting in Li Village Gulch in January 1946 and they had come to understand the real nature of landlordism (see IV.ii below).

The intellectual origins of the theory that involves conceiving mediaeval serfdom as a voluntary contractual arrangement are not traced back by North and Thomas beyond 1952.<sup>3</sup> I should like to suggest that an important formative influence in establishing the background of thought in which such theories may flourish was a short book written nearly half a century ago by a young English economist who was soon to become very prominent: Lionel Robbins, *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science* (1932, second edition 1935). Robbins carefully isolates economics from contamination by such disciplines as history or sociology or politics, by defining it (on p. 16 of his second edition) as 'the science which studies human behaviour as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses'. Individuals make a series of choices,

which for the purpose of the theory have to be treated as free choices, in flagrant disregard – as Maurice Dobb pointed out in 1937<sup>4</sup> – of the class relations which in reality largely determine such choices. (The significance of 1932, a year of acute capitalist crisis in England, as the date of publication of the first edition of Robbins's book is too obvious to need emphasis.) From that position, it is but a short step to serfdom as a nice, contractual relationship – and if serfdom, then why not slavery, which, as its defenders from George Fitzhugh onwards proclaimed (see VII.ii below), provides a security for the slave to which the individual wage-labourer cannot aspire?

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If we now turn to Max Weber's sociological approach to ancient history, we can find elements of real value, even if in the end we feel dissatisfied with the categories he employs, as unclear and unhelpful.<sup>5</sup> If I may speak as a historian – sociologists not thoroughly trained as historians who have ventured outside their own familiar world into earlier periods of history have often made disastrous mistakes and have sometimes produced conclusions of little or no value, simply because of their inability to deal properly with historical evidence. Weber not only possessed rare intellectual quality; he was trained in Roman law and history, and his earliest work, after his doctoral thesis, was a Roman *Agrargeschichte* (1891).<sup>6</sup> It is a pity that British ancient historians today, with few exceptions, seem to be little interested in Weber. Even Rostovtzeff, who did not miss much, had not read the very interesting lecture Weber delivered and published in 1896, 'Die sozialen Gründe des Untergangs der antiken Kultur' (see IV.iii below), which seems to me Weber's best piece of historical writing, and of which English translations, as 'The social causes of the decay of ancient civilisation', have now become easily available.<sup>8</sup> I must admit, however, that Weber, who wrote about Greek society as well as Roman, evidently knew much less at first hand about the Greek world than the Roman, and that he was much less at home when dealing with Greek history.<sup>9</sup> It is also an unfortunate fact that the English reader who is not already well versed in sociological literature and terminology is likely to find Weber hard to read in the original German.<sup>10</sup> (There are many different English translations, varying from excellent to very poor; the notes provided with them vary even more, some being worse than useless.)<sup>11</sup> At times Weber can be lucid enough, even for quite long stretches; but often he lapses into an obscurity which does not always repay the repeated re-readings it invites. In particular, his use of various forms and combinations of the German word 'Stand' can be a source of confusion – even, I think, for the German reader. Talcott Parsons, whose translations of Weber are excellent, could say in a footnote to one of them:

The term *Stand* with its derivatives is perhaps the most troublesome single term in Weber's text. It refers to a social group the members of which occupy a relatively well-defined common status, particularly with reference to social stratification, though this reference is not always important. In addition to common status, there is the further criterion that the members of a *Stand* have a common mode of life and usually more or less well-defined code of behaviour. There is no English term which even approaches adequacy in rendering this concept. Hence it has been necessary to attempt to describe what Weber meant in whatever terms the particular context has indicated (Weber, TSEO 347-8 n.27).



The whole footnote is an attempt to explain how Parsons has come to translate Weber's 'ständische Herrschaft' by 'decentralised authority' – a rendering which nicely illustrates the difficulty he is trying to explain. (My reason for dwelling upon Weber's use of the word *Stand* will shortly become apparent.)

Under Weber's powerful influence above all, it has become an accepted practice on the part of sociologists to concern themselves with what is usually referred to as the 'social stratification' of human societies, under one or more of three aspects: *economic*, in terms of class; *political*, in terms of authority or domination or power; *social*, in terms of status or honour or prestige. I must add at once, with all possible emphasis, that Marx shows not the least interest in social stratification, a spatial metaphor which I think he scarcely ever employs in connection with his concept of classes, even as the metaphor it is. (Any such expression as 'the stratification of classes', in *Cap. III.885*, is very rare.) He uses the term 'the middle class' (or 'middle classes', or some variant) quite frequently, in the sense in which it had come to be regularly employed by his day, as a synonym for 'the bourgeoisie' or 'the capitalist class'; but he rarely refers to 'upper' or 'lower' classes, although in the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, for example, he can refer to 'the social strata situated above the proletariat' in France (*MECW XI.110*). My own practice in this book is the reverse: I avoid using the term 'middle class' in relation to the ancient world, because of its inevitable modern colouring, but I often find it convenient to speak of 'upper' and 'lower' classes. Near the beginning of *The Communist Manifesto* Marx and Engels did speak of the existence, in 'earlier epochs of history', of 'various orders, a manifold gradation of social rank' (*MECW VI.482-5*); but in spite of the occurrence of a few phrases of that kind in their works, it would be a great mistake to conceive the Marxist class analysis as an attempt to construct a scheme of 'social stratification'. Neglect of this cardinal fact has led to much misunderstanding of Marx. Although of course it is perfectly possible to produce a series of such schemes of stratification for the ancient world at different periods, the result, however true to reality, will not provide an instrument of historical analysis and explanation in any way comparable with the application of the Marxist concept of class. At this point, however, I wish to glance briefly at theories of social stratification couched primarily in social or political terms.

That the primary and most useful kind of classification was social status was in effect the position of Max Weber (according to my understanding of it), and it has recently been explicitly re-stated in relation to the Greek and Roman world by M. I. Finley. Let us first concentrate on Weber. It was said of him (with some exaggeration) by the German sociologist Albert Salomon that he became a sociologist in a long and intense dialogue with the ghost of Karl Marx!<sup>12</sup> He was not altogether hostile to Marx (whom he never ventured to disparage), and he was prepared to concede 'eminent, indeed unique, heuristic significance' to Marx's concepts, considered as a form of his own 'ideal types', but he refused to allow them any empirical reality.<sup>13</sup> According to the American sociologists, H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, in their Introduction to a well-chosen set of extracts from Weber's writings, 'Throughout his life, Max Weber was engaged in a fruitful battle with historical materialism. In his last course of lectures in Munich at the time of the Revolution [1918], he presented his course under the title, "A positive critique of historical materialism"' (*FMW 63*). How far Gerth

and Mills were justified in adding at this point, 'Yet there is a definite drift of emphasis in his intellectual biography towards Marx', I leave to others to decide. I have certainly not been able to discover anywhere in Weber's works any serious discussion of Marx's concept of class – an omission which I find very strange.

I must say, it would have been a rare pleasure to attend the lecture Weber gave on socialism to the officer corps of the Austro-Hungarian Royal Imperial army in Vienna in July 1918, in which Weber actually described *The Communist Manifesto* in terms of the greatest respect:

This document, however strongly we may reject it in its critical theses (at least I do), is in its way a scientific achievement of the first rank [*eine wissenschaftliche Leistung ersten Ranges*]. That cannot be denied, neither may one deny it, because nobody believes on e and it is impossible to deny it with a clear conscience. Even in the theses we nowadays reject, it is an imaginative error which politically has had very far-reaching and perhaps not always pleasant consequences, but which has brought very stimulating results for scholarship, more so than many a work of dull correctness.<sup>14</sup> (I resist the temptation to continue the quotation.)

I shall try to represent those of Weber's views that are immediately relevant as fairly as I can; but the reader who fears that his stomach may be turned by the horrible jargon that is characteristic of so much sociological theorising and by the repellent welter of vague generalisation that infects even a powerful intellect like Weber's in such circumstances had better skip the next few paragraphs.

Weber gave more than one explanation of what he meant by *Stand* and *ständische Lage*, which can here be translated 'status group' and 'status situation'. He discusses classification in this social sense as well as in economic and political terms in two passages in his posthumously published *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (both very difficult, but now easily available in good English translations),<sup>15</sup> and he also deals with the subject of *Stände* elsewhere, for example in an essay on the 'world-religions' written in 1913,<sup>16</sup> and in one of his works on India dating from 1916.<sup>17</sup> Although Weber, I think, never says so expressly, it seems clear to me that he regarded 'status situation' as the most significant kind of classification, even if, in accordance with his general principles, he did not actually make it the necessary determinant of 'class situation' (*Klassenlage*, a term he used in quite a different sense from Marx),<sup>18</sup> and indeed said that status situation might be 'based on class status directly or related to it in complex ways. It is not, however, determined by this alone . . . Conversely, social status may partly or even wholly determine class status, without, however, being identical with it'.<sup>19</sup> For Weber, status groups were normally 'communities' (*Gemeinschaften*), and men's status situation includes 'every typical component of the life fate of men that is determined by a specific, positive or negative, social estimation of honour [*soziale Einschätzung der Ehre*]', involving 'a specific style of life [*Lebensführung*]'.<sup>20</sup> In his opinion, 'the decisive role of a "style of life" in status "honour" means that status groups are the specific bearers of all "conventions". In whatever way it may be manifest, all "stylisation" of life either originates in status groups or is at least conserved by them'.<sup>21</sup> And 'status groups are stratified according to the principles of their consumption of goods as represented by special "styles of life"'.<sup>22</sup> We can therefore agree with the opinion expressed by Reinhard Bendix, one of Weber's greatest admirers, that 'Weber's approach conceived of society



as an arena of competing status groups, each with its own economic interests, status honour, and orientation toward the world and man. He used this perspective in his analysis of the landed aristocracy, the rising bourgeoisie, the bureaucracy, and the working class in imperial Germany. He used the same perspective in his comparative sociology of religion' (MWIP 259-63, at 262). And in its constant attention to 'social stratification' twentieth-century sociological theory has broadly followed Weber. As S. N. Eisenstadt put it in 1968, 'The central concept in later sociological analysis of stratification, largely derived from Weber, is that of prestige' (*Max Weber On Charisma and Institution Building*, Introduction, p. xxxiii).

Yet Weber could also admit, in the essay on world-religions to which I have already referred, that 'Present-day society is predominantly stratified in classes, and to an especially high degree in income classes.' (In the previous sentence he had distinguished between 'propertied classes' and 'primarily market-determined "income classes"'.) He went on, however: 'But in the special status prestige of the "educated" strata, our society contains a very tangible element of stratification by status.' Shortly afterwards he added, 'In the past the significance of stratification by status was far more decisive, above all for the economic structure of the societies.' A little earlier in the same passage he had defined 'class situation' as 'the opportunities to gain sustenance and income that are primarily determined by typical, economically relevant, situations'; and he had said that 'A "status situation" can be the cause as well as the result of a "class situation", but it need be neither. Class situations, in turn, can be primarily determined by markets, by the labour market and the commodity market' (Gerth/Mills, FMW 301: see n. 16 to this section).

This is confusing, and the confusion hardly resolves itself when we put this passage together with the two in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* referred to above, which contain Weber's formal discussion of economic, social and political classification. Here, in the earlier passage (no. 1 in n. 15), under the general heading of 'Concepts' (*Begriffe*), we are first told that 'a class is any group of persons occupying the same class situation (*Klassenlage*)', and we are then introduced to various different types of class: the 'property class' (*Besitzklasse*), the 'acquisition class' (*Erwerbsklasse*), and the 'social class' (*soziale Klasse*); after some unilluminating remarks, especially on the significance of property classes, both 'positively privileged' and 'negatively privileged', we suddenly encounter 'the "middle" classes' (*Mittelstandsklassen*). The discussion that follows, mainly of 'acquisition classes' and 'social classes', consists of a string of poorly connected observations. We then move on to 'social status' – I have already quoted one or two sentences from Weber's account of this. No kind of organising principle seems to be at work, and the various kinds of class evidently overlap in all sorts of ways. Things are at first a little better – though not much – when we reach the second main passage (no. 2 in n. 15), at the very end of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*. Here we do at least find a definition of 'class':

We may speak of a 'class' when (1) a number of people have in common a specific causal component of their life chances, in so far as (2) this component is represented exclusively by economic interests in the possession of goods and opportunities for income, and (3) is represented under the conditions of the commodity or labour markets (Gerth/Mills, FMW 181).

And a little later we are told that

Always this is the generic connotation of the concept of class: that the kind of chance in the market is the decisive moment which presents a common condition for the individual's fate. 'Class situation' is, in this sense, ultimately 'market situation' (FMW 182).

We begin to see a little light at the end of the tunnel, although we are still very much in the dark as to how many classes Weber would recognise and at what points he would draw the boundaries between them. Slaves, because their 'fate is not determined by the chance of using goods or services for themselves on the market' (FMW 183), are a status group (*Stand*) and not a class at all 'in the technical sense of the term' – according, that is to say, to Weber's definition of class.

The faint light continues to glow, although still very much in the distance, when we go on in the next paragraph to learn that 'According to our terminology, the factor that creates "class" is unambiguously economic interest, and indeed, only those interests involved in the existence of the "market".' So far, so good: at least this is intelligible. But alas! we then find ourselves in a particularly luxuriant and stifling Weberian thicket: 'Nevertheless, the concept of "class-interest" (*Klasseninteresse*) is an ambiguous one: even as an empirical concept it is ambiguous as soon as one understands by it something other than the factual direction of interests following with a certain probability from the class situation for a certain "average" of those people subject to the class situation' (still FMW 183). For the next page or two things get better again, and there are some interesting observations; the only one that I need notice is, 'The "class struggles" of antiquity – to the extent that they were genuine class struggles and not struggles between status groups – were initially carried on by indebted peasants, and perhaps also by artisans threatened by debt bondage and struggling against urban creditors . . . Debt relationships as such produced class action up to the time of Catiline' (FMW 185). And in the last few pages of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* one firm statement stands out from the medley, the second half of which I have already quoted above in dealing with Weber's status groups: 'With some over-simplification, one might say that "classes" are stratified according to their relations to the production and acquisition of goods; whereas "status groups" are stratified according to the principles of their consumption of goods as represented by special "styles of life"' (see FMW 193). Weber makes a very similar statement to that last one in an essay on Indian society, first published in 1916, to which I have already referred: '"Classes" are groups of people who, from the standpoint of specific interests, have the same economic position. Ownership or non-ownership of material goods or of definite skills constitute the "class-situation". "Status" is a quality of social honour or a lack of it, and is in the main conditioned as well as expressed through a specific style of life' (FMW 405: see n. 17 to this section).

A proper comparison of Weber's categories with those of Marx would take us too far from our main subject, but certain features of this comparison leap to the eye, and of these I shall single out three:

1. Weberian 'status' stratification plays no significant role in the thought of Marx, who (as I said earlier) shows no interest in social stratification as such. In so far as classes happen to be status groups and are stratified accordingly, it is their class relationship that matters to Marx, rather than any stratification according



to status. Is this a defect in Marx? The answer to this question depends on the value we attach to 'social stratification' as an instrument of historical or sociological analysis. But – and this is my first point – Weber in fact makes virtually no significant use of his 'status groups' in explaining anything. Although I have read many of Weber's works, I cannot claim to know them all, and it may be that I have missed something; but my statement is certainly true of the great bulk of his writings, whether on the society of his own day or on Classical antiquity or on China – or even on the rise of capitalism, in what is perhaps his most famous work among historians, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.<sup>23</sup> Only in writing of India does Weber attribute a central explanatory role to one peculiar, and indeed unique, form of 'closed status group', the caste.

2. Weber's use of the term 'class', as is evident from my citations above, is totally different from that of Marx. (As I have already observed, I have not myself found in Weber any discussion of Marx's concept of class; and I may add that after consulting many works by his disciples I have not been able to discover any reference to such a discussion.) To me, Weber's notion of class is exceedingly vague and inherently incapable of precise definition. According to one of his own statements, quoted above, classes can be 'stratified'; but even if classes are (according to another such statement) 'groups of people who, from the standpoint of specific interests, have the same economic position' (a highly indefinite specification), *how are the boundaries of classes to be ascertained?* That is the essential question, and my second point is that Weber fails to provide an answer to it. Individuals, certainly, can be regarded as 'stratified', after a fashion, according to 'economic position' in general; but if we are to have stratified *classes* we need to be able to define their respective *boundaries* in some way, even if we are prepared to allow for some indeterminate borderline cases and do not wish to have hard-and-fast lines of demarcation. 'A class', after all, 'is a class is a class', and we must be able to define different classes.

3. But it is my third contrast between the categories of Weber and Marx which is by far the most important. The 'status groups' and even the 'classes' of Weber are not necessarily (like Marx's classes) in any *organic relationship* with one another; and consequently they are not dynamic in character but merely lie side by side, so to speak, like numbers in a row. Class in Marx's sense, as I said at the beginning of my definition in Section ii of this chapter, is essentially a relationship, and the members of any one class are necessarily related *as such*, in different degrees, to those of other classes. The members of a Weberian class or status group *as such*, on the other hand, need not have any necessary relationship to the members of any other class or status group *as such*; and even where a relationship exists (except of course where the classes or status groups concerned happen to be also classes in Marx's sense), it will rarely involve anything more than efforts by *individuals* to rise up in the social scale – a feature of human society so general and obvious that it hardly helps us to *understand* or *explain* anything except in the most trite and innocuous way. I have no wish to minimise the importance which may sometimes attach to certain features of status in a *static situation* – that is to say, when we are looking at a society as it is at a given point in time, and not in a historical perspective, as a developing organism. For example, members of a status group near one extreme of a stratified social scale may seldom if ever marry members of another such group at the opposite end of the scale; and in India membership

of one particular type of closed status group, namely caste, may even involve contamination for members of one caste who are involved in certain kinds of contact with members of another. I would insist, however, that when we are concerned with *social change*, these and similar status elements have at best a negative importance: they may help to account for the absence of such change, but they can never explain why it takes place.

Perhaps I can best bring out the difference between thinking in terms of class and status categories respectively by considering slaves. Is it more profitable to regard them as a class in the Marxist sense, in which case we must oppose them to slaveowners, masters; or is it more useful to treat them as a status group (indeed, as an 'order', a juridically recognised form of status), in which case they must be opposed either to free men in general or to some special category of free men, such as citizens, or freedmen? The question surely answers itself, if we believe that the most significant feature of the condition of slaves is the virtually unlimited control which their masters exercise over their activities, above all of course their labour (cf. III.iv below). Between slaves and free men (or citizens, or freedmen) there is no relationship of involvement, but rather a technical difference – however important it may be in some contexts. Slaves and wage-labourers, slaves and poor peasants, slaves and petty traders are not *significantly related* as are slaves and slaveowners. (I find it strange that Marx and Engels could speak carelessly of relations between free men and slaves, or citizens and slaves, when they were clearly thinking of relations between slaveowners and slaves: see above.)

Recently Sir Moses Finley has explicitly rejected a Marxist analysis in terms of economic class and has reverted to a classification by status which seems to me virtually identical with Weber's, although I think he does not so identify it himself. Now it may be that Finley had some better reason in mind for discarding a class analysis, but in his book, *The Ancient Economy* (p.49), he gives only one argument, which, as I showed in Section iii of this chapter, rests on a serious misunderstanding of what Marx meant by 'class'. (It is unfortunately all too characteristic of contemporary Western historiography of the ancient world that one of the few practitioners who has taken the trouble to examine some of the concepts and categories with which he operates should have failed to grasp even the basic elements of Marx's thought.) As for exploitation (which does not even appear in Finley's Index, but does raise its head feebly once or twice), it is treated by Finley only in connection with conquest and imperialism (e.g. AE 156–8); but both 'exploitation' and 'imperialism' are for him 'in the end, too broad as categories of analysis. Like "state", they require specification' (AE 157), which they never receive from him; and after a couple of paragraphs they are dropped again.<sup>24</sup>

It is fascinating to observe the way in which Finley (AE 45) introduces his analysis of ancient society – ultimately, as I have said, in terms of 'status', after he has rejected a classification primarily according to either 'orders' or 'class'. He makes it plain from the outset (reasonably enough, in view of the nature of our evidence) that he is going to begin by concentrating on those at the top end of the social scale: 'they alone,' he says, 'are at present under consideration.' But who are these people? He actually defines them as 'the *plousioi* of antiquity'. But, as he



himself has already made it clear (AE 41), 'a *plousios* was a man who was rich enough to live properly on his income (as we should phrase it)': he is the characteristic member of my 'propertied class' (III.ii below). Finley begins his analysis, then, by accepting a definition in terms of economic class, and specifically with those I am calling 'the propertied class' – an unconscious admission of the inadequacy of his own chosen categories. One remembers here the reluctant admission of Weber, in the midst of his discussion of 'status honour': 'Property as such is not always recognised as a status qualification, but in the long run it is, and with extraordinary regularity' (FMW 187).<sup>24</sup>

Of course I admit that ancient society can be *described* (though hardly 'analysed' and certainly not 'explained') in the manner advocated by Weber and Finley; but Finley's description, compared with one based upon Marx's class categories, is as inadequate as Weber's and is open to much the same objections. I am certainly not at all attracted by Finley's unfortunate metaphor (which has already been given a wide currency, by himself and others) of 'a spectrum of statuses and orders' (AE 68, cf. 67): I am much happier when he says that 'rich Greeks and Romans' (and presumably not only rich ones) were 'members of criss-crossing categories' (AE 51). But 'criss-crossing categories' represent a kind of classification which is the very opposite of a 'spectrum' (or 'continuum')<sup>25</sup> and, I must say, more appropriate to Greek and Roman society, if we want to think in terms of 'social stratification'. Indeed, the characteristics according to which we may wish to classify ancient Greeks and Romans were sometimes complementary, sometimes the reverse: political rights (citizen or non-citizen), social prestige and economic position, for example, might reinforce each other in a particular case or they might not – Lysias and his brother Polemarchus may have been among the richest men in late-fifth-century Athens, and in 404 they are certainly said to have owned the largest number of slaves which can be reliably credited to any Greek of the Classical period,<sup>26</sup> but in Athens they were metics (resident foreigners) and enjoyed no political rights; and some of the wealthiest men known to us in the late Roman Republic and early Principate were freedmen, whose strictly social status was much lower than it would have been had they not been born in slavery. (See the useful Appendix 7, 'The size of private fortunes under the Principate', in Duncan-Jones, *EREQS* 343–4: here five of the first sixteen men are freedmen, the first four of them imperial freedmen.)

Status, as conceived by Finley (following Weber), is often convenient enough as a pure means of classification; and again, I have no wish to deny its usefulness for some purposes. As an analytical tool, however, it has, when compared with Marx's concept of class, the same fatal weaknesses as the corresponding set of categories in Weber.

First, as Finley himself admits, it is inescapably 'vague', because the word 'status' has (as he puts it, AE 51) 'a considerable psychological element'. In defining a man's status we are always obliged to take into account other people's estimation of him – a factor not at all easy to evaluate even in our own contemporary world, and surely impossibly difficult in antiquity, from which only a small fragment of the necessary evidence has survived. I think I know what Finley means when he describes 'status' as 'an admirably vague word' (AE 51), but I do not share his belief in the utility of its vagueness.

Secondly, and much more important, status is a purely descriptive category, with no heuristic capacity, no such explanatory power as the dynamic Marxist concept of class provides – because (as I said earlier, when criticising Weber) there can be no organic relationship between statuses. I realise that Finley himself believes that 'at the upper end of the social scale, the existence of a spectrum of statuses and orders . . . explains much about economic behaviour'; he goes on to assert that 'the same analytical tool helps resolve otherwise intractable questions about the behaviour at the lower end' (AE 68). I cannot myself see how his 'spectrum of statuses and orders' *explains* anything whatever, at either end of the social scale. Anyone who makes such a claim must surely be prepared to prove it by giving a number of examples – as I am doing throughout this book, to illustrate the value of a Marxist analysis. Finley does nothing of the sort. The only example I can find in his book is the one he goes on at once to give, and this is a false example, which does nothing to establish his position. 'Helots revolted,' he says, 'while chattel slaves did not in Greece, *precisely because the helots possessed (not lacked) certain rights and privileges, and demanded more*' (AE 68, my italics). This is clearly false. The Helots – mainly the Messenian helots rather than those of Laconia, who were far fewer in number (Thuc. I.101.2: see III.iv n.18 below) – revolted, ultimately with success, not because they had 'rights and privileges' or because they 'demanded more', but because they alone, of all Greek 'slaves', were a single united people, who had once been the independent *polis* of 'the Messenians' (Messene, as we should call it), and who could therefore take *effective action in common*, and because they wanted to be *free* and an independent entity (the *polis* of 'the Messenians') once more, whereas the slaves of virtually all other Greek states were, as I have put it elsewhere, 'a heterogeneous, polyglot mass, who could often communicate with each other only [if at all] in their masters' language, and who might run away individually or in small batches but would never attempt large-scale revolts' (OPW 89–94, esp. 90). I have looked in vain elsewhere in Finley's book for any actual use of his 'spectrum of statuses and orders' to 'explain economic behaviour' or to 'help resolve otherwise intractable questions about the behaviour at the lower end' of the spectrum. And his sentence that follows the one I have quoted above about the helots, 'Invariably, what are conveniently called "class struggles" in antiquity prove to be conflicts between groups at different points in the spectrum disputing the distribution of specific rights and privileges', is simply beside the point if classes and class struggle are understood in the way I am advocating.

There is a very real difference in historical method between a Weber-Finley type of approach and that which I am advocating in this book. I can only say, again, that the method I am adopting makes it possible to offer an *explanation* in situations where Finley is obliged to stop short with *description*. I can best illustrate this, perhaps, from Finley's attempt to give what he himself calls an 'explanation' of 'the "decline" of slavery' during the Roman Principate and its replacement to a considerable extent by the colonate (AE 84–5 & ff.) – a process I have discussed in IV.iii below. In VIII.i below I have tried to make clear the radical difference between the explanation (which is no explanation) given by Finley and that which I offer in this book.

The acceptance of class criteria as the essential ones can also enable us to over-



come triumphantly the dilemma with which Finley found himself confronted when he set himself to answer the question, 'Was Greek civilisation based on slave labour?' – the title of a paper (mentioned in n.25 to this section) to which I shall refer in its reprinted form, in *SCA = Slavery in Classical Antiquity* (1960), ed. Finley, 53–72. Under the influence of his unfruitful notion that we do best to 'think of ancient society as made up of a spectrum of statuses' (*SCA* 55), Finley found himself unable to make proper sense of his own question, even after he had gone part of the way to answering it, with a cautious and grudging 'If we could emancipate ourselves from the despotism of extraneous moral, intellectual, and political pressures, we would conclude, without hesitation, that slavery was a *basic element* [my italics] in Greek civilisation' (*SCA* 69). But he then shies away from the question altogether: the word 'basic', he believes, 'has been pre-empted as a technical term by the Marxist theory of history'; and he declares that 'neither our understanding of the historical process nor our knowledge of ancient society is significantly advanced by . . . repeated statements and counter-statements, affirmations and denials of the proposition, "Ancient society was based on slave labour"'. He concludes by throwing up his hands and substituting a totally different question from that of his title: 'not whether slavery was the basic element, or whether it caused this or that, but how it functioned' – an enormous and entirely open-ended question, to which of course there can never be any summary answer, or anything approaching a complete one, so that we are absolved from any obligation to provide more than fragments of an answer. Let us discard the 'spectrum of statuses, with the free citizen at one end and the slave at the other' (*SCA* 55), as a tool of analysis, and begin again, with class instead of status. We can then formulate the specific question I posed in Section iii of this chapter: did the propertied class obtain its surplus mainly by the exploitation of unfree (especially slave) labour? It is by giving an affirmative reply to this question that we are also able to answer, in the most effective way possible, the question to which Finley eventually found himself unable to give a confident reply: 'Was Greek civilisation based on slave labour?'

I am very far from wishing to discard social status as a *descriptive* category. Of course it has important uses in relation to the Greek world, especially in cases where it partakes of some legal recognition and can therefore be considered as constituting an 'order' in the technical sense: a juridically defined category, invested with privileges, duties, or disadvantages. Before the Greek cities came under Roman rule, by far the most important form of status was the possession of citizenship (very much an 'order'), which gave access not merely to the franchise and the possibility of political office, but also to the ownership of freehold land in the area of one's *polis*. (We cannot be absolutely sure that this was true of every Greek city, but it certainly applied to Athens and a good many others, and it is likely to have been the universal rule in the Classical period.) Citizenship was normally obtained by birth alone; special grants (usually for services rendered) were rare in the Archaic and Classical periods but became more common in Hellenistic times. Non-citizens at Athens could take land on lease (see e.g. *Lys.* VII.10) but could not own land in freehold unless they had been specially granted the right of *gēs enktēsis* by the sovereign Assembly<sup>27</sup> – a privilege which seems to have become more frequent from the late fifth century onwards but was probably not extended very widely. The situation at most other

cities is less well known, but it looks as if Athens was not untypical in this respect. In the Hellenistic period the practice of granting to non-citizens (individually, or collectively as members of some other community) the right to own land within the territory of the *polis* gradually grew, and in due course this right seems to have become widely available and to have been extended in particular to all Roman citizens.<sup>28</sup> During the Hellenistic period there was also a great expansion of *isopoliteia*, the mutual exchange of citizenship between cities, and this practice continued in the Roman period: it was so strong that a Roman attempt to forbid it in Bithynia-Pontus by the 'Lex Pompeia' was being widely disregarded by the end of the first century (Pliny, *Ep.* X.114; see Sherwin-White, *LP* 724–5). Some prominent men became not only citizens but councillors of several other cities: there is much evidence for this, both epigraphic (e.g. *IGRR* IV.1761; *MAMA* VIII.421.40–5) and literary (e.g. Pliny, loc. cit.; Dio Chrys. *XLI*.2,5–6,10). This situation sometimes caused problems concerning liability for local magistracies and liturgies (compulsory municipal burdens), and the Roman government was obliged to legislate about it from the second century onwards (see Sherwin-White, *LP* 725).

The possession or lack of political rights would not of itself determine a man's class, in the sense in which I am using that term, so that in an oligarchy a man who had the civil rights of citizenship, but lacked the franchise and access to office because he had not quite a sufficient amount of property, would not necessarily, on my scheme, have to be put in a different class from his neighbour, a fraction richer, who just succeeded in scraping into the oligarchic *politeuma* (the body of those possessing full political rights). The non-citizen, however, the *xenos* who lacked even the civil rights of citizenship, would certainly fall into a different class, if he was not one of those rare foreigners who had been granted full *gēs enktēsis* by the State, for without this essential right of property he would be unable to own the one form of wealth upon which economic life mainly depended.

Another 'order' may be seen in those 'resident foreigners' who had official permission to reside in a particular *polis* for more than a brief period, and whose official status was sometimes (as at Athens) carefully regulated: these 'resident foreigners' are usually referred to nowadays as 'metics' (from the Greek word *metoikoi*),<sup>29</sup> and that is how I shall speak of them, although the term *metoikoi* was not universal in the Greek world even in the Classical period, and it largely died out in the Hellenistic age. (Other expressions found in Greek cities in place of *metoikoi* include *synoikoi*, *epoikoi*, *katoikoi*, and later predominantly *paroikoi*.)<sup>30</sup> I shall mainly ignore metics in this book, since the great majority of them who were neither political exiles nor freedmen would be citizens of some other city, living by choice in their city of residence; and even today such people do not normally have citizen rights in the country they happen to reside in. (Political exiles were men deprived of citizenship; and Greek freedmen, unlike Roman freedmen, seem virtually never to have been granted citizenship on manumission, a fact which I shall try to explain in III.v below.) Since the metic who was a citizen of *polis* A but preferred to live in *polis* B could normally return to A and exercise political rights there if he wished, there is no need for me to pay any special attention to him. It is often assumed nowadays that, in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. anyway, the merchants who carried on the external trade



of a given city would mostly be metics living in that city; but this is a misconception, as I have shown elsewhere (OPW 264-7, 393-6; cf. II.iv n.27 below).

When the Greek cities came under Roman rule, the possession of Roman citizenship (until that was extended in about A.D. 212 to virtually all free inhabitants of the Roman empire) created a new 'order', the importance of which is nicely illustrated in the story of St. Paul in Acts XXI-XXVI (see VIII.i below). In due course Greeks gradually penetrated into the equestrian and even the senatorial order, the imperial nobility (see VI.vi below). The 'curial order' (which became to all intents and purposes a class), another feature of the Roman period, I shall deal with in VIII.ii below. Certain kinds of individual prowess such as military ability, literary or forensic skill, and even athletic proficiency (cf. OPW 355), could sometimes enable a man to rise beyond the status into which he was born, or at least enhance his 'ständische Lage'; but these and other such forms of personal quality require no particular attention here, since their possession would merely facilitate the 'upward social mobility' of the individuals who possessed them.

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I do not think that any historian or sociologist who is concerned with the ancient world will want to analyse its social structure in terms that are basically political. The substitution of such a method for a Marxist analysis in terms of economic class has certainly been argued for the modern world, most eloquently perhaps by Dahrendorf, some of whose views I have discussed in Section iii of this chapter. His position is well summarised in the Inaugural Lecture which he delivered at Tübingen and was published in English in 1968:<sup>31</sup> '[Social] stratification is merely a consequence of the structure of power.' (This lecture of course needs to be read with Dahrendorf's other works, in particular his book, *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society*, 1959, mentioned in Section iii of this chapter.) I find Dahrendorf's conclusions quite unconvincing for modern society,<sup>32</sup> and they are certainly even more defective when applied to the ancient world: I doubt if any ancient historian would feel inclined to follow them. As I have said before, I am not myself much interested in 'social stratification', and Marx certainly was not. But the view we are considering, that social stratification depends primarily on political power, has an important element of truth in it, which emerges clearly when the theory is re-stated in a less exaggerated form. Access to political power may have very important effects upon the class struggle: a class in possession of economic power will use its political authority to reinforce its dominant economic position; and on the other hand an exploited class which is able to exercise some degree of political influence will seek to protect itself against oppression. That extraordinary phenomenon, Greek democracy, was essentially the political means by which the non-propertied protected themselves (see V.ii below) against exploitation and oppression by the richer landowners, who in antiquity always tended to be the dominant class (see III.i-iii below). In the seventh century and earlier, before the emergence of democracy, there was probably a great deal of the kind of exploitation of the poor by the rich which we find in Solon's Attica at the opening of the sixth century (see V.i below). In a Greek democracy, however, making its decisions – probably for the first time in human history (see OPW

348-9) – by majority vote, the poor, because they were the majority, could protect themselves to a certain extent. They could sometimes even turn the tables on the rich, not only by obliging them to undertake expensive liturgies (especially, at Athens and elsewhere, the trierarchy), but also by occasionally confiscating their property when they were convicted in the courts. Such measures were a form of redistribution which might be loosely compared with the progressive taxation imposed by modern democratic governments. Thus political conflicts in Greek states would tend to reflect opposed class interests, at least in some degree; but this was by no means always the case, any more than it is today, and more often there was nothing like a one-to-one correspondence of political and economic factors; sometimes, indeed, there may be little visible alignment of class divisions with what we know of a particular political contest in Greek history. At crises, however, even at Athens (in 411 and 404, for example: see V.ii below), political factions might largely coincide with class divisions.

At Athens and some other cities in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. there was an astonishing development of real democracy, extending to some extent right down to the poorest citizens: this is a good example of exceptional political factors operating for a time in such a way as to counterbalance economic forces. But, as I shall explain in V.iii below, the basic economic situation asserted itself in the long run, as it always does: the Greek propertied classes, with the assistance first of their Macedonian overlords and later of their Roman masters, gradually undermined and in the end entirely destroyed Greek democracy.

It goes without saying that when one people conquers another its leading men may often, if they wish, appropriate the whole or some part of the land and other wealth of the conquered. Thus Alexander the Great and his successors claimed the whole of the *chōra* of the Persian empire, on the ground – whether true or false (cf. III.iv below) – that it had all belonged ultimately to the Great King; and they proceeded to make massive land grants to their favoured followers, whose dominant position in the areas concerned then had a 'political' origin, being derived from a royal grant. The Romans sometimes appropriated part of the land of a conquered people as *ager publicus populi Romani*, public land of the Roman People: it would then be leased out to Roman citizens. And in the Germanic kingdoms set up from the fifth century onwards by Visigoths, Ostrogoths, Vandals, Franks and others, in what had once been parts of the Roman empire, in Gaul, Spain, north Africa and Britain, and later in Italy itself, the rights of the new landowners and rulers were again derived from conquest. But all these examples are of highly exceptional cases, involving conquest by outsiders. Corresponding internal phenomena can be found in the seizure of wealth by those who had first gained power not as a result of their economic position but as adventurers (especially *condottieri*) or revolutionaries, who consolidated their rule by appropriating the property of citizens in general or of their political adversaries. But again all such cases are exceptions. That in the regular course of events it was political power which regularly determined social stratification is an idea which seems to me to lack all confirmation from the history of the ancient world.

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There are two other positions I ought to mention. The first is that represented



by L. V. Danilova, in an article originally published in Russian in 1968 and in an English translation, as 'Controversial problems of the theory of precapitalist societies', in *Soviet Anthropology and Archaeology* 9 (1971) 269-328, which first came to my notice as a result of Ernest Gellner's article, 'The Soviet and the Savage', in the *Times Literary Supplement* 3789 (18 October 1974) 1166-8. Danilova's general theory, which she admits to be contrary to the prevailing Soviet view, is that in pre-capitalist societies control of the conditions of production is not the principal way in which exploitation is secured by a ruling class, and that it is 'direct relations of dominance and subjection' (a phrase which doubtless owes its origin to Marx's *Herrschafts- und Knechtschaftsverhältnis*: see Section iii of this chapter) which are 'the basis of social differentiation'. As regards the Greek and Roman world and western Europe in the Middle Ages, this view seems to me to have nothing in its favour, and I shall therefore waste no time on it here. It is also clearly contrary to the views of Marx, although Danilova tries to justify it in Marxist terms.

The other position I want to mention here may appear at first sight to be very different from the Marxist class analysis I am presenting, but turns out in the end to be reconcilable with it. This involves regarding the ancient Greek world as a 'peasant society' or even 'peasant economy', in the sense in which those terms have been used by A. V. Chayanov, A. L. Kroeber, Robert Redfield, Teodor Shanin, Daniel Thorner and many others. In IV.ii below I discuss 'the peasantry' in antiquity. Although I do not find the concept of an overall 'peasant economy' useful in relation to the Greek and Roman world, it is true that those we may legitimately call 'peasants' (provided we define them as I do in IV.ii below) were actually a majority of the population in vast areas of the ancient world, and for long periods in many places were responsible for a major share of total production. Recognising the existence of 'peasants' or 'the peasantry' is entirely compatible with my general approach, provided a class analysis is applied throughout, as it is in IV.i-iii below.

To conclude this section, I wish to make it clear that I am not denying all value to the approaches I have been criticising. Some of them, indeed, can be very useful, if in a limited way, and some of their practitioners have made valuable contributions to knowledge. A much-quoted aphorism which can be traced back to Sir Isaac Newton and even to Bernard of Chartres reminds us that however limited our own capacities we can see farther than others by 'standing on the shoulders of giants',<sup>33</sup> those great men of the past whose insights can give us a new vision. But it is not only the giants of the past whose shoulders may offer us a platform for new vistas: standing on the shoulders even of dwarfs, if hardly as rewarding, may at least raise us a little above those around us who are content to stand only on their own feet. (I say this, of course, without imputing dwarf-like characteristics to any of the writers I have been examining here.)

## (vi)

## Women

The production which is the basis of human life obviously includes, as its most essential constituent part, the reproduction of the human species.<sup>1</sup> And for anyone who, admitting this, believes (as I do) that Marx was right in seeing position in

the whole system of production (necessarily including reproduction) as the principal factor in deciding class position, the question immediately arises: must we not allow a special class role to that half of the human race which, as a result of the earliest and most fundamental of all divisions of labour, specialises in reproduction, the greater part of which is biologically its monopoly? (Under 'reproduction' I of course include in the role of women not merely parturition but also the preceding months of pregnancy, and the subsequent period of lactation which, in any but the advanced societies, necessarily makes the care of the child during the first year and more of its life 'woman's work'.)

Marx and Engels, it seems to me, failed to draw the full necessary conclusion. Engels, in the Preface to the original German edition (*Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigentums und des Staats*) of the work I refer to by its English title, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, written in 1884 (the year after Marx's death), acknowledged specifically that 'the production and reproduction of immediate life' is, 'according to the materialistic conception, the determining factor in history'. And he went on at once to emphasise its 'twofold character: on the one hand, the production of the means of subsistence, of food, clothing and shelter and the tools requisite therefor; on the other, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species'. Marx and Engels, who were always talking about the division of labour in production, did speak casually, in the *German Ideology* (1845-6) of procreation as involving 'the first division of labour', but for them, 'the division of labour . . . was originally nothing but the division of labour in the sexual act [*im Geschlechtsakt*]' (MECW V.44, my italics); and this seems to me to miss the main point – as indeed Engels appears later to have realised, for when, two-thirds of the way through the second chapter of *The Origin of the Family*, he quoted this very passage (as appearing in 'an old, unpublished manuscript, the work of Marx and myself in 1846'), he changed the wording slightly, to 'The first division of labour is that between man and woman for the production of children [*zur Kinderzeugung*]', and he added, 'The first class antagonism [*Klassengegensatz*] which appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamous marriage, and the first class oppression [*Klassenunterdrückung*] with that of the female sex by the male' (my italics: MESW 494-5). And in the same early work from which Engels quoted, Marx and Engels said that 'the nucleus, the first form, of property lies in the family, where wife and children are the slaves of the husband. This latent slavery in the family, though still very crude, is the first form of property; but even at this early stage it corresponds perfectly to the definition of modern economists who call it the power of disposing of the labour-power of others' (MECW V.46). Yet Marx and Engels seem hardly to have realised what far-reaching consequences ought to have been drawn from this particular specialisation of role, within their own system of ideas above all. Engels' *Origin of the Family* deals with the subject, to my mind, very inadequately. (It is perhaps a pity that this work of Engels has had such great influence on Marxist thought: although a brilliant and very humane study, it is too dependent on limited and secondhand information in both anthropology and ancient history, and its general picture is far too unilinear.) I propose to take perfectly seriously the characterisation of the role of women, or anyway married women (I leave these alternatives open), as a class, which is implied in the *German*



*Ideology*, and for a brief moment, in the passage I have quoted, becomes explicit in the second chapter of *The Origin of the Family*.

Now the effective property rights of women have often been restricted in practice. Sometimes this has applied to all the women of a given society, sometimes particularly to the married women, whose property rights have often been more limited (or even more limited) than those of the rest of their sex, as for example in modern England until the Married Women's Property Acts of 1882 and after began to effect a change. A few years ago the fact suddenly dawned upon me that Athenian women in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. – apart perhaps from a handful of expensive prostitutes, like Neaera and her circle (Ps.-Dem. LIX) and Theodote (Xen., *Mem.* III. xi, esp. § 4), who of course were not citizens – were quite remarkably devoid of effective property rights and were apparently worse off in this respect than women in many (perhaps most) other Greek cities of the period, Sparta in particular, or for that matter in Hellenistic and Roman Athens (see my OPRAW). A suggestion I then made that the question of property rights of Greek women was worth investigating on a much larger scale has already been taken up, in a Harvard thesis and a book by David Schaps,<sup>13</sup> and I hope there will be further studies. There are all too many interesting questions in this field which I myself certainly cannot answer, and I doubt if anyone can – at least (if the evidence is available) until much more research has been done.

Meanwhile, this is the thesis I propose. In many societies either women in general, or married women (who may be regarded in principle as monopolising the reproductive function),<sup>2</sup> have rights, including above all property rights, markedly inferior to those of men; and they have these inferior rights as a direct result of their reproductive function, which gives them a special role in the productive process and makes men desire to dominate and possess them and their offspring. In such societies it is surely necessary, on the premises I have accepted, to see the women, or the wives (as the case may be), as a distinct economic class, in the technical Marxist sense. They are 'exploited', by being kept in a position of legal and economic inferiority, so dependent upon men (their husbands in the first place, with their male kin, so to speak, in reserve) that they have no choice but to perform the tasks allotted to them, the compulsory character of which is not in principle lessened by the fact that they may often find real personal satisfaction in performing them. Aristotle, in a perceptive passage which I have quoted in Section iii of this chapter, could speak of the propertyless man (the *aporos*), who could not afford to buy slaves, as using his wife and children in their place (*Pol.* VI.8, 1323<sup>a</sup>5-6).

Needless to say, if we think of women (or married women) as a class, membership of such a class may or may not be the prime criterion of a woman's class position. (As I have explained in II.ii above, it is perfectly possible for many individuals to belong to more than one class, and it may then be necessary to determine the essential one, membership of which is paramount for them.) I suggest that in our present case the relative importance of a woman's membership of the class of women (or wives) will depend to a high degree upon whether her economic and legal condition is very different from that of her menfolk. In Classical Athens I would see the class position of a citizen woman belonging to the highest class as largely determined by her sex, by the fact that she belonged

to the class of women, for her father, brothers, husband and sons would all be property owners, while she would be virtually destitute of property rights, and her class position would therefore be greatly inferior to theirs. The humble peasant woman, however, would not in practice be in nearly such an inferior position to the men of her family, who would have very little property; and, partly owing to the fact that she would to some extent participate in their agricultural activities and work alongside them (in so far as her child-bearing and child-rearing permitted), her membership of the class of poor peasants (cf. IV.ii below) might be a far more important determinant of her class position than her sex. Even less, perhaps, would the class of a non-citizen town-dwelling prostitute or *hetaira* be decided primarily by her sex, for her economic position might be virtually identical with that of a male prostitute or any other non-citizen provider of services in the city. We must of course realise that to place a woman in a separate class from her menfolk would often cut right across the usual criteria of 'social stratification', so far as the property-owning classes are concerned: within a single family the husband might be in the highest class, while his propertyless wife, in respect of the distinction I have just been making, might rate very low indeed; but in life-style she would rank according to the status of her husband. Since those elements in a woman's position which derive from her being virtually the possession of another are very precarious and unstable, I would tend to discount the husband's position as a factor in the real status of the wife, important as it may seem on the surface, and put more emphasis on any dowry which the women can rely on receiving and controlling, in accordance with custom. But this needs a great deal of further thought.

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I believe that I am justified in including these brief and oversimplified remarks on the position of women in the ancient Greek world – at any rate in the Classical period, of which I am now mainly thinking, as I know too little in detail as yet of the property rights of Greek women in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, before Roman law became in theory the universal law of the Mediterranean world, in the third century.<sup>3</sup> Greek wives, I have argued, and therefore potentially all Greek women, should be regarded as a distinct economic class, in the technical Marxist sense, since their productive role – the very fact that they were the half of the human race which supported the main part of the burden of reproduction – led directly to their being subjected to men, politically, economically and socially. Not only were they generally deprived of even the most elementary political rights; they were also, as a rule, allowed only very inferior property rights, and they suffered other legal disabilities; a woman's marriage was entirely at the will of her *kyrios* (normally her father, or if he were dead, her eldest brother or nearest male relative),<sup>4</sup> who, in at least some Greek states, could also withdraw her from her marriage and give her to another husband;<sup>5</sup> and in very many other ways she was at a disadvantage compared with her menfolk. An Athenian woman could not inherit in her own right, from her father at least: if he died without leaving a natural or adopted son, she as *epiklēros* was expected to marry the nearest male relative (who would divorce any wife he might have already), and the property would pass to their male children, thus remaining in the family.<sup>6</sup> Many (perhaps most) other Greek states seem to have



had customs that were similar in at least some degree.

Marriage was every Greek woman's normal lot, so that it was as wife and mother that she lived above all. The only group of women who were in a completely different category were prostitutes (often slaves or freedwomen, and virtually never of citizen status), the very ones who removed themselves from the 'class' of women as far as possible by minimising their reproductive function. In Classical Athens at least they may have had in practice a greater control of property than citizen women, and the same may have been true of other states.

I would suggest that where, as at Athens, women are largely deprived of property rights, one good result may follow. If property is fairly widely distributed in the first place, and if (as in all or nearly all Greek states) marriage is patrilocal, so that the girl leaves her father's clan and family and, taking with her whatever she possesses either as dowry or in her own right, goes to join her husband's family, then to keep women propertyless may well help to prevent property from accumulating rapidly in the hands of the richer families. If women can inherit property in their own right they will, in a society where marriage is patrilocal and inheritance patrilineal, remove it from their father's family into their husband's; and of course a father who has (in default of sons) an heiress daughter will naturally, if he is able to give her in marriage outside his kin, find her the richest husband he can, for her own protection. At Sparta, the fact that daughters could inherit in their own right and that the *patrouchos* (the Spartan equivalent of the Athenian *epiklēros*) did not have to marry the next-of-kin must have played a major part in bringing about the concentration of property in a few hands which reduced the number of adult male Spartan citizens (the *homoiot*) from eight or nine thousand to hardly more than a thousand by the date of the battle of Leuctra in 371 B.C. (see my *OPW* 137-8, 331-2, cf. 353-5). At Athens, as I have already explained, there could be no such thing as a daughter inheriting in her own right, and the *epiklēros* had to marry the next-of-kin and thus keep the property in the family. This would help to preserve family property, and would work against automatic accumulation by the already rich through the processes of marriage and inheritance; and the resulting greater equality of property among citizen families is likely to have been one of the factors making for the exceptional strength and stability of the Athenian democracy.

The whole situation is to me a good illustration of the validity of Marx's class analysis, in that it is *the woman's place in production* which was directly responsible for her special status, and in particular created a tendency (observable in many other societies) for her to be denied those property rights which were available to men, and indeed to become herself an object of property rights on the man's part, so that both she and her children could be secured as possessions by her husband. However, woman's inferior social, economic, legal and political position, although a probable and very frequent consequence of her position in the productive process, is not of course a necessary consequence. Even in some modern capitalist societies (in England, for example, since 1975) her rights are the same, or nearly the same, as those of her brothers, although she is still likely to find it more difficult to exercise many of them. And in some early societies, especially perhaps those depending on a light form of agriculture which is particularly well suited to

be women's work, she has enjoyed rights superior in some respects to those of men, including the capacity to transmit property (or some forms of property) primarily in the female line (matrilineality, *Mutterrecht*). But in a patrilineal society where dowry and not 'bride-price' or 'indirect dowry' prevails, a woman can be seen as a positive danger to the family into which she is born, for (as we have already noticed) when she marries she will take property out of the family. In such a society we can expect to find the woman's property rights restricted in some degree; Classical Athens was merely an extreme case. Plato, in the *Laws*, went so far as to forbid dowries altogether (V.742c; cf. VI.774c).

In the Greek world a baby girl probably always had a worse chance than a baby boy of surviving, or at least of being reared by its own parents. Exposure of infants, of course, has often been resorted to as a means of population control: by the rich or the moderately well-off in order to prevent the division of inheritances, and even more by the poor in their struggle for survival (see V.i and its n.6 below). There is a great deal of evidence for exposure, scattered through Greek literature.<sup>7</sup> It was no doubt an exaggeration characteristic of Comedy when Poseidippus the Athenian dramatist (writing around the 280s and 270s B.C.) made one of his characters assert that 'Everyone rears a son even if he is poor [*penēs*] but exposes a daughter even if he is rich [*plousios*].' (Cf. Terence, *Heautontim.* 626-30.) However, there are indications that exposure of girls was indeed more common than of boys. In particular, in a famous papyrus of 1 B.C. an Egyptian named Hilarion (who seems to have been a wage-labourer) writes from Alexandria to his wife Alis at Oxyrhynchus, telling her that if she has a child she is to rear it if a boy but expose it if a girl (*P. Oxy.* IV.744 = *SPI*.294-5, no.105).

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I now turn to a brief treatment of Christian marriage as an institution and Christian attitudes towards women and on sexual matters, subjects which I believe to be very relevant to the class position of Greek women, because of the influence Christianity has had in depressing the status of women. We must not forget that the ancient Greek world, according to my definition of it (I.ii above), was at least partly Christian during the later centuries of its existence and had become predominantly Christian well before the end of my period. Early Christian marriage has not been fully investigated by historians (as distinct from theologians) in the light of its Hellenistic, Jewish and Roman counterparts.<sup>8</sup> We often hear Christian marriage praised today; but its admirers, in my experience, very seldom grasp the fact that in its origins it was more backward and more oppressive towards women than most varieties of marriage in the Graeco-Roman world: in particular, (1) as in Jewish marriage, the subjection of the woman to her husband was both more strongly emphasised than in other systems and given a divine origin not found elsewhere; and (2) an unhealthy attitude to sex and marriage can be seen in some of the books of the New Testament, regarded by the dominant form of early Christianity as divinely inspired, the very Word of God.

I propose to deal with the second point first, although I regard it as the less important of the two. Christianity did not have the healthy acceptance of sex and marriage which was in the main a feature of Judaism,<sup>9</sup> but treated marriage



as a second-best to virginity. Since this attitude is too often discussed as if it were characteristic of St. Paul only, I will begin with the passage in the *Apocalypse* in which the 144,000 (all male Israelites), who are called 'the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb' and who are represented as sealed on their foreheads with the divine name, are described as 'they which were not defiled [*ouk emolynthēsan*] with women, for they are virgins' (Rev. XIV.1-5, esp. 4, with VII.2-8). However, it is true that the most powerful influence exerted upon early Christianity towards disparaging sex and even marriage was the seventh chapter of St. Paul's *First Epistle to the Corinthians* (I Cor. vii.1-9, 27-9, 32-4, 39-40, esp. 2, 9).<sup>10</sup> To say that marriage, for St. Paul, was a 'necessary evil' would be to go a little too far; but we must begin by recognising that for him the married state was clearly inferior to virginity. It is an indisputable fact that the *only* purpose of marriage specifically mentioned by Paul is the avoidance of fornication ('because of acts of fornication': I Cor. vii.2);<sup>11</sup> and it is only if the unmarried and widows 'cannot be continent' that they are to marry, 'for it is better to marry than to burn [with sexual desire]' (verse 9). Indeed, Paul suffered from an aversion to sex as such: he opens his disquisition on sex and marriage in I Cor. vii with the emphatic generalisation, 'It is good for a man not to touch a woman' (verse 1). If this is, as some have maintained, a quotation from a Corinthian letter to him, written perhaps from an exaggeratedly ascetic standpoint, and if Paul is answering, in effect, with a 'Yes, but . . .', let us at least be clear that he is saying 'Yes'! And a little later he says, 'It is good for the unmarried and widows to abide even as I' (verse 8). Paul was very complacent about his own continence: he could actually say, 'I would that all [and by *pantas anthrōpous* he almost certainly means 'all men and women'] were even as I myself' (verse 7). Apologies have often been made for Paul on the ground that he was thinking in eschatological terms, in daily expectation of the Second Coming; but I cannot myself see that this excuses him in any way. (We have even been presented recently with the concept of 'the eschatological woman';<sup>12</sup> but of this theological fantasy the less said the better.)

I come now to the most important aspect of the attitude of the early Christians to women and marriage: their belief – which, as we shall see, was firmly rooted in the Old Testament – that wives must be subject to their husbands and obey them. In most of the passages I shall be quoting it is wives specifically who are addressed, rather than women in general; but of course in the ancient Greek world virtually all girls could be expected to marry – the 'maiden aunt' and even the 'spinster' are phenomena unknown to antiquity. Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* 591-7 provides 'the exception that proves the rule'. (I think I should add that when in I Cor. vii.25 St. Paul says he has 'no commandment from the Lord concerning virgins', we must not be tempted to say that virgins are fortunate indeed, for I am among those who believe that the passage may have a much more limited application than may appear at first sight.)<sup>13</sup> I cannot of course set out all the relevant evidence here and will merely concentrate on the most important passages. In I Cor. xi.3 and Ephes. V.22-4 a striking parallel is drawn between the relation of the husband to the wife and that of God to Christ and of Christ to man (I Cor. xi.3) or to the Church (Ephes. V.23), upon which is based the command to the wife not merely to *reverence* her husband (the word used in Ephes. V.33 is *phobētai*: literally, 'let her go in dread') but to be *subject* to him in

the most complete sense: the word *hypotassesthai*,<sup>14</sup> which is used of this relationship in Ephesians (V.22,24), Colossians (III.18), Titus (II.5), and I Peter (iii.1), is the word also used in the Epistles for the subjection of slaves to their masters (Tit. II.9; I Pet. ii.18), of ordinary people to State power (Rom. XIII.1; Tit. III.1), of Christians to God the Father (Hebr. XII.9; James IV.7; cf. I Cor. xv.27-8), and of the Church to Christ (Ephes. V.24, where the relationship Church : Christ = wives : husbands is explicit; cf. 23). In I Timothy ii.11 the woman is to 'learn in silence, in all subjection' (*en pasēi hypotagēi*). The forceful metaphor employed both in I Cor. xi.3 and in Ephes. V.23 is that of the 'head', *kephalē* in Greek. 'The head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God' (I Cor. xi.3). 'Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church; and he is the saviour of the body. But as the Church is subject unto Christ, so let wives be to their own husbands in everything' (Ephes. V.22-4).

At this point, unfortunately, I am obliged to turn aside in order to deal with a highly technical question concerning the metaphor of the 'head' (*kephalē*), to which I have just referred, since desperate attempts have recently been made by theologians to play down the notion of authority which it certainly conveys. And this will also raise, for some people, the problem of the genuineness of the various 'Pauline' epistles. I will deal briefly with the latter point first. There can be no doubt that St. Paul regarded his own rulings on the subjects of women, sex and marriage as directly inspired by God, even when he knew of no tradition of a statement by Jesus on a particular point.<sup>15</sup> This places in an exceedingly difficult position those Christians who are reluctant to reject authoritative statements in their sacred books entirely but are nevertheless sufficiently responsive to modern humanist – not only feminist – criticism to find some of the 'Pauline' statements intolerable as they stand. Those statements, it is felt, cannot mean what they say: although for centuries they have been accepted by virtually all Christian churches as divinely inspired, in their literal and natural sense, they must now be given a very different interpretation. I know of no historian who would be prepared to countenance such exegesis, but it does seem to have an appeal to some theologians, as we shall see. One expedient is to exclude certain texts always accepted until recently as written by Paul himself but now regarded by many New Testament scholars as pseudo-Pauline (or 'deutero-Pauline', a nice euphemism) and the work of later writers.<sup>16</sup> One can then pretend that there are no real 'difficulties' except perhaps I Cor. vii and xi.3-15 – although what we need to do is to see what these texts meant to contemporaries, and of course the 'deutero-Pauline' material is very relevant to such an enquiry, providing as it does some evidence of how contemporaries interpreted the 'genuine' epistles. As it happens, I am myself far less interested in the views of Paul himself than in what I may call 'Pauline Christianity', which is mainstream early Christianity, basing itself upon all the epistles attributed to Paul, as well as the other books of the New Testament.

The meaning of *kephalē* (head) in I Cor. xi.3 (and the 'deutero-Pauline' Ephes. V.23) is central. In 1954 an acute analysis by Stephen Bedale<sup>17</sup> established that in some contexts in the Epistles, when *kephalē* is used metaphorically (as it rarely is outside the Septuagint and the New Testament),<sup>18</sup> its essential idea may be that of



priority, origin, beginning. However, Bedale admitted, honestly and correctly, that the word in its metaphorical sense (like *archē*, which can also signify either 'rule' or 'beginning') 'unquestionably carries with it the idea of "authority"', even if 'such authority in social relationships derives from a relative priority (causal rather than merely temporal) in the order of being'.<sup>19</sup> (Here Bedale was apparently thinking of woman's imagined origin from man – Eve from Adam – pictured in Genesis II. 18–24.) Dealing with the 'headship' of the male in I Cor. xi.3 (primarily in the sense of 'origin'), Bedale adds, 'In St. Paul's view, the female in consequence is "subordinate"' (cf. Ephes. V.23). But this principle of subordination which he finds in human relationships rests upon the order of creation.<sup>20</sup> It is absolutely impermissible to go beyond this and to treat *kephalē* in our passages as meaning *only* 'source' and not *also* 'authority'.<sup>21</sup> And whatever may be intended by the 'head' metaphor, the very fact that the *relationship* of man (or husband) to woman (or wife) is *equated* in I Cor. xi.3 with that of Christ to man and God to Christ, and in Ephes. V.23 with that of Christ to the Church, makes the relationship of woman to man one of total subordination: this is entirely consistent with the other New Testament evidence which I quoted above.

Some Christians in the modern world have been inclined to lay much of the blame, not only for the unhealthy attitude to sex but also for the subjection of wives to their husbands in early Christian thought and practice, upon the peculiar psychology of St. Paul, who of course was deeply influenced by his devout Jewish upbringing (for which see Acts XXII.3) and also conceivably by the fact that in Tarsus, his home town, women were veiled in public (Dio Chrys. XXXIII.48–9). I must make it clear, therefore, that in reality the subjection of the wife to the husband was part of Christianity's inheritance from Judaism, *necessarily* including (as we shall see) a thorough-going conception of the dominance of the husband, which Christianity actually intensified. This is a very important question which requires emphasis. In these days, when most Christians venerate the Old Testament far less than did the early Church, and the opening chapters of Genesis are taken literally and seriously by none but the most ignorant and bigoted Fundamentalist, we may need to make a conscious effort to remember three features of the account of the creation of man and woman, and of the 'Fall' and its consequences, in Genesis II–III, which more enlightened Christians often prefer to forget. (1) First, and most important in its practical influence upon Christian marriage, is the fact that in Gen. III.16 God himself is made to proclaim the authority or lordship of the husband over the wife. No such religious sanction for male dominance existed in Greek or Roman paganism.<sup>22</sup> A passage in Josephus is explicit about the inferiority of the wife to the husband 'in all respects', according to the Jewish Law. 'Let her therefore be submissive [*hypakouetō*], not for her humiliation but so that she may be controlled [*archētai*], for God gave power [*to kratos*] to the husband' (C. Apion. II.201). Interpolation has been suspected, but in any event this passage is an adequate description of the position of the first-century Jewish wife (see e.g. Baron, *SRHJ* II<sup>2</sup>.236). Philo uses even stronger language than Josephus: in *Hypoth.* 7.3 he says that in Jewish law, 'with a view to their rendering obedience in all respects', wives must 'be *slaves* to' their husbands – the actual word *douleuein* is used. (I think I should take this opportunity just to mention a particularly nasty passage in Philo, justifying the Essenes for refraining from marriage on the

ground that wives are unpleasant in various ways and a source of corruption – I shrink from reproducing his invective: *Hypoth.* 11.14–17.) (2) Secondly, there is the extraordinary fact that in Gen. II.21–4 the woman is not brought into existence independently and at the same time as the man, like all the rest of Creation (including, apparently, female animals!), but was made after man and from one of his ribs. This of course reverses the actual order of things: man is now born of woman, but the first woman is depicted as having been taken from man and created specifically to be his 'help meet' (Gen. II.18,20). As St. Paul put it, 'For the man is not of the woman, but the woman of the man; for neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man' (I Cor. xi.8–9; cf. Mk II.27 for a very similar use of the Greek preposition *dia*). This particular myth in Genesis has long been a powerful buttress of male 'superiority'. There is, of course, every reason to think that Jesus himself and all his followers, including Paul, accepted the myth in its literal sense, as if it represented historical fact; we are not dealing with a mere Pauline aberration. And in face of this, it is grossly dishonest to pretend that Paul could have had any other view than the one he expresses, in favour of the subjection of the wife to the husband.

Both the aspects of the Genesis story that I have just described were part of the Jewish legacy to the Christian conception of marriage, which overall was certainly nearer to the Jewish than to the Roman or even the Hellenistic variety. (3) A third feature of the Genesis myth, equally accepted as fact by the early Christians, was the greater responsibility of the woman for the 'Fall'. She eats the forbidden fruit first and persuades the man to follow her example (Gen. III.1–6, 12 and esp. 16–17), with the result that God gives her a special punishment: having to endure pain in childbearing (III.16, where the authority of the husband over her is also laid down). Because of Christian soteriology, in which the 'Fall' played an essential part, the leading role attributed to the first woman, which appears only occasionally in Jewish writings (e.g. Ecclus. XXV.24), naturally figured more prominently in Christian than in Jewish theology. In this respect Christianity made an unfortunate use of its Jewish inheritance. For the writer of I Tim. ii.11–14 the facts that 'Adam was first formed, then Eve', and that 'Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in transgression' (cf. II Cor. xi.3: 'the Serpent beguiled Eve') are the justification – indeed, the sole explicit justification – for the order to the woman to 'learn in silence with all subjection', and not to 'teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence' (cf. I Cor. xiv.34–5).

Some recent writers have made much of the fact that many of St. Paul's converts who are named in the New Testament were women; but this has no significance at all in the present context. A large number of female converts was only to be expected, since religion formed 'the major outlet for female activity in the Roman world', as Averil Cameron has pointed out in an article, 'Neither male nor female', to be published in *Greece & Rome* in 1980, which she has been kind enough to show me.<sup>23</sup> And of course there is not the least sign that any of these women occupied a place of authority or even importance in their local churches. Nor need the historian take any serious account of that text so often quoted by theologians, Galatians III.28: 'There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither bond nor free; there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus' (cf. Coloss. III.11 for a similar text, not mentioning the sexes). I have



discussed both these passages near the beginning of VII.iii below. They have a purely spiritual or eschatological meaning and relate only to the situation as it is 'in the sight of God', or 'in the next world'; they have no significance whatever for this world, where the relations in real life between man and woman, or master and slave, are not affected in any way. Precisely as the slave who is a good man ceases, in Hellenistic philosophical thought, to be 'really' a slave at all (see VII.iii below), so the slave becomes 'Christ's freedman' merely by becoming a Christian; and the woman achieves oneness with the man, the Jew with the Greek, in exactly the same way. The situation of none of them in *this world* is altered in the slightest degree; and of course the whole train of thought provides a convenient excuse for *doing* nothing whatever to *change* the situation of the disadvantaged, for, theologically, they have *already* achieved everything.

Now it would not have been at all surprising to find the early Christians simply adopting the Jewish and/or Hellenistic social practice of their day, in regard to sex and marriage as in other ways, but we find them taking a position which was even more patriarchal and oppressive than that of most of their contemporaries. Distinctly more enlightened ideas were common in the world around them. Roman marriage in particular had developed beyond other systems in the rights it allowed to women, whether married or not. (The existence of the Roman *patria potestas* does not disprove my assertion.)<sup>23</sup> I think Schulz was right in regarding the Roman law of husband and wife as the supreme example in Roman jurisprudence of humanistic sentiment, and in attributing the later decay of some of its most progressive features to the much more male-dominated thought-world of the invading German 'barbarians' and of the Christian Church (CRL 103-5). The Roman law of marriage, by the way, showed remarkable tenacity in resisting the modifications (the abolition of divorce by consent, for example) desired by the Church and the Christian emperors from Constantine onwards: this has been very well brought out by A. H. M. Jones (*LRE* II.973-6, with III.327-8 nn.77-82). As we all know, the Christian churches have tended until very recently either to forbid divorce altogether or at best (as in England until very recently, and in Scotland still) to permit it only upon proof of a 'matrimonial offence' by one party against the other – a disastrous notion, productive of much unnecessary suffering, not to mention frequent collusive divorces.

Apprehensive and irrational ideas about the regularly occurring 'uncleanness' of woman during her reproductive years might have been expected to have some effect on early Christianity, since such ideas were not uncommon in the pagan Greek and Roman world (see IV.iii § 10 below) and were particularly strong in Judaism. In Leviticus XV, representing in its present form one of the latest strands of the Torah (however ancient its origins), great stress is laid upon the pollution incurred by contact with a menstruating woman or even anything she has touched (Levit. XV.19-33; cf. Isai. XXX.22). Intercourse with such a woman is a capital crime for both parties (Levit. XX.18).<sup>24</sup> Many people who fail to understand the strength of feeling often associated with beliefs about ritual pollution may be astonished when they read one of the finest passages in the Old Testament, in which Ezekiel gives what I have called elsewhere 'an explicit and emotional repudiation of the whole idea of joint family responsibility for crime' (so firmly embedded in the older strata of the Hebrew Scriptures),<sup>25</sup> and

discover that 'coming near to a menstruous woman' is placed in the same category as idolatry, adultery, the oppression of the poor, the taking of usury and so forth, as a serious crime justifying punishment (Ezek. XVIII.1 ff., esp. 6). The 'Mosaic' legislation on the subject of 'uncleanness' was taken very seriously indeed by the rabbis. To go no further than the *Mishnah* – one whole tractate, *Niddah*, occupying some 13 pages (745-57) in the standard English translation by Herbert Danby (1933), is devoted entirely to menstruation and the pollution it entails, and the subject is noticed in numerous passages in other tractates. (There are some nice rulings, e.g. on how large a blood-stain which a woman finds on herself may be set down to a louse: the answer is 'of the size of a split bean', *Nidd.* 8.2. Contrary to what might be suggested by considerations of hygiene, irrelevant here, the assumption of infestation may thus *remove* suspicion of 'uncleanness'!) It is to Christianity's credit that in the end it was not much influenced by superstitious ideas of this particular kind, at any rate in the West. In some of the Greek-speaking communities, however, there remained a deep-seated feeling that woman's regular 'uncleanness' made it wrong for her, while so afflicted, to take communion and even perhaps to enter a church. The earliest official exclusions of women in this condition from communion, so far as I know, are by two patriarchs of Alexandria: Dionysius (a pupil of Origen), around the middle of the third century, and Timothy, c. 379-85, whose rulings became canonical in the Byzantine Church and were confirmed by the 'Quinisext' Council in *Trullo* at Constantinople in 692.<sup>26</sup> The Trullan Canons, passed by Eastern bishops only, were rejected in the West; but to this day the Orthodox churches, including the Greek and the Russian, refuse communion to women during menstruation.

It is true that the Christians were in theory more insistent than the great majority of pagans upon the necessity for men as well as women to abstain from sexual intercourse outside marriage (from 'fornication'); but there were pagans who condemned adultery by husbands as much as by wives (see below for Musonius Rufus), and a statement by the Roman lawyer Ulpian, that it is 'most inequitable that a husband should exact chastity from his wife when he does not practise it himself', is preserved in the *Digest* (XLVIII.v.14.5). What evidence there is from the Later Roman Empire suggests to me that the Christian churches were hardly more successful than the pagans in discouraging 'fornication'; and the conspicuous prevalence of prostitution in Christian countries down the ages shows that mere prohibitions of conduct regarded for religious reasons as immoral, even if backed by threats of eternal punishment, may have little effect if the structure of society is not conducive to their observance. And the irrational hatred of sex in its physical manifestations (with the grudging exception of marriage) which was so characteristic of early Christianity from St. Paul onwards sometimes led to an asceticism which bordered on the psychopathic. The modern reader of some of the letters and other works of St. Jerome (an over-sexed man who was bitterly ashamed of his natural feelings) may be deeply moved by the unnecessary suffering caused in this highly gifted individual by a set of insane dogmas which he never questioned, and the observance of which sometimes created in him a deep agony of mind which could hardly be vented except in some excessively ferocious and even scurrilous tirade against a religious adversary (a Helvidius or a Vigilantius) who had dared to say something



Jerome could interpret as a disparagement of the Virgin Mary or of virginity in general.<sup>27</sup>

As a wholesome corrective of the popular Christian view, repeated over and over again in modern times, that the early Church introduced an entirely new and better conception of marriage and sex, it is worth reading some of the fragments that have been preserved of the Stoic philosopher of the second half of the first century, Musonius Rufus – perhaps the most attractive, to my mind, of all the later Stoics. He was a Roman of the equestrian order (see Tac., *Hist.* III.81), but he probably did most of his teaching in Greek, and although he is not reliably credited with any written works, a certain amount of his doctrine is preserved (almost entirely by Stobaeus) in some fairly substantial Greek fragments compiled by an unknown pupil, whose name is transmitted to us merely as Lucius. The English reader can enjoy the benefit of a complete text (virtually the standard one by O. Hense, 1905), with a good facing English translation and a useful introduction, as part of an article (also published separately) entitled 'Musonius Rufus, "The Roman Socrates"', by Cora E. Lutz, in *YCS* 10 (1947) 3–147.<sup>28</sup> Musonius is both more rational and more humane than St. Paul in his attitude to women, sex and marriage, and he is exceptionally free from the male-dominated outlook, desiring the subjection of women to their husbands, which was common enough in antiquity but was stronger among the Jews than among many pagans (the Romans above all) and was implanted in Paul by his orthodox Jewish upbringing (see above). According to Musonius: (1) in marriage 'there must be above all perfect companionship and mutual love of husband and wife', in sickness and in health; (2) 'all men consider the love of husband and wife to be the highest form of love'; (3) husbands who commit adultery are doing wrong just as much as wives, and it is very objectionable for them to have sexual relations with their slave-girls; (4) marriage is an excellent thing, and even the philosopher should accept it gladly; and (5) girls should receive the same kind of education as boys, extending to philosophy.<sup>29</sup> Although Musonius sees the sphere of activity of a woman as different in some ways from that of a man, he never suggests that she is in any way inferior to him or that she ought to be subjected to him or dominated by him. Most of the individual statements attributed to Musonius which I have just quoted can be paralleled in other Greek and Latin authors, but I fancy that their combination is exceptional.

If we want an explanation of the failure of the Christian churches to effect in practice any noticeable change for the better in moral or social behaviour, even in those spheres (such as the prohibition of fornication for men as well as women) in which it advocated a higher standard than that commonly accepted in the Graeco-Roman world, we may find it in the conclusion of a parable to which I shall have occasion to refer again later (VII.iv below), that of Lazarus. When the rich man suffering the torments of hell begged that Lazarus might be enabled to go and preach to his five brothers and save them from sharing his dreadful fate (for surely they would listen to one risen from the dead), the reply was, 'They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them . . . If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead' (Lk. XVI.27–31). In order to generalise this statement, we must substitute, for 'Moses and the prophets', 'the general climate of orthodox

opinion in society': if men are not swayed by that, Jesus is saying, even one who has risen from the dead is not likely to move them. Hence we should not expect Christian preaching itself to make much difference to men's behaviour, as distinct from their purely spiritual life – nor did it.

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I need hardly add that very much more can be done than in most modern societies to reduce the male dominance which has been characteristic of the great majority of civilised societies, subjecting a high proportion of women to the exploitation and oppression which are (as we have seen) normal consequences of class conflict. Of course, the brainwashing process we all go through in childhood has played a powerful role here: a particular stereotype has commonly been foisted upon females from infancy onwards, and naturally the vast majority have largely accepted it, as if it were an inevitable biological necessity rather than a social construction which could be changed.<sup>30</sup>

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I trust that this section will serve to exculpate me from any crime I may have committed in the eyes of feminists by sometimes speaking of the slave, serf, peasant etc. as a 'he' rather than a 'he/she' (or 's/he').